

BLAKE ON LANGUAGE,
POWER, AND
SELF-ANNIHILATION



JOHN H. JONES



To Annihilate the Self-hood of Deceit & False Forgewords

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AND SELF-ANNIHILATION

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Dedicated to my parents, H. Boyd Jones and
Sandra B. Jones, and to my wife, Alison Brooks Jones

And the Divine voice came from the Furnaces, as multitudes without Number! the voices of the innumerable multitudes of Eternity.

—William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*

Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

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PREFACE

The idea for this book was prompted many years ago by a footnote in W. J. T. Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art*. In his discussion of *The Book of Thel*, Mitchell refers to Blake's term "self-annihilation"—which Blake uses only much later in his career—to explain that Thel resists the Lilly, Cloud, and Clod of Clay because she does not give herself to experience and that she lacks the faith, spontaneity, and selflessness of the other characters. In the footnote to this discussion, Mitchell acknowledges the anachronism of his use of "self-annihilation," saying that *Thel* raises "problems which Blake could solve only by writing more poems, and which the reader can solve only by reading on through the illuminated books" (87). While I don't know that I, as a reader, actually "solve" any problems, I take up Mitchell's suggestion and attempt to trace a trajectory in Blake's thinking and poetry that leads him to his concept of "self-annihilation." Although the work of many other scholars have profoundly influenced my work, it starts by following a direction already mapped out by W. J. T. Mitchell, as is the case with so many works on Blake.

Along the way, I have been the grateful beneficiary of much advice, help, and support. Michael S. Macovski has helped me immensely throughout the development of this project, and his tireless enthusiasm has truly been an inspiration. Constance W. Hassett, Mark L. Caldwell, Philip T. Sicker, and Gerry O'Sullivan offered crucial suggestions and invaluable guidance that have significantly influenced the shaping of my ideas. Thanks are also due to Stephen Leo Carr and Josephine Ann McQuail for their commentary on and assistance with earlier essays that became the foundation for this book. In the exchange of ideas at conferences, a number of colleagues offered many valuable suggestions and advice, including John B. Pierce, Peter Otto, John E. Grant, Jennifer Davis Michael, R. Paul Yoder, Steve Clark, Jason Whittaker, and David M. Baulch. I am deeply indebted to the superb staff of the Houston Cole Library, especially Harry Nuttall, Debra Deering-Barrett, and George Whitesel, who generously offered invaluable research support. I am also grateful for the support of my English department colleagues, especially Bob Felgar, Steve Whitton, Joanne Gates, Bill Hug, Randy

Davis, Carmine Di Biase, and Teresa Reed, who helped me handle tempestuous situations, turn errant winds favorable, and wade treacherous waters, and for the timely and always reliable clerical support from Cynthia Weaver and Susan Hurst. I owe great thanks to the editors at Palgrave Macmillan, Brigitte Shull and Lee Norton, who were always incredibly helpful, offering expert advice with grace and patience, and to the anonymous reader for Palgrave Macmillan, whose insightful suggestions have made this book stronger.

I am also grateful to the editors of *Modern Language Studies* and the *Colby Quarterly* for granting permission to reprint previously published material. Revised portions of the Introduction and Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 appeared originally in "'Self-Annihilation' and Dialogue in Blake's Creative Process: *Urizen, Milton, Jerusalem*," in *Modern Language Studies* 24.2 (1994): 3–10. A revised version of a section of Chapter 3 originally appeared as "Printed Performance and Reading *The Book[s] of Urizen*: Blake's Bookmaking Process and the Transformation of Late Eighteenth-Century Print Culture" in *Colby Quarterly* 35 (1999): 73–89. I am also thankful for the generosity of the Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress, which owns the original versions of the illustrations in this book.

Finally, I owe the greatest debt and express the deepest gratitude to my wife, Alison Brooks Jones, who is also my best friend and most helpful critic. Without her continuous support and unwavering encouragement, this book, and so much else, would never have been possible.

As an aid to readers, I offer a brief guide to my handling of frequently cited works. All quotes from the works of William Blake are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose*, edited by David V. Erdman. The following are abbreviations for titles of Blake's works cited in the text:

ARO	<i>All Religions Are One</i>
E	<i>Miscellaneous prose or commentary from the Erdman edition</i>
Eur	<i>Europe: A Prophecy</i>
FZ	<i>The Four Zoas</i>
GA	<i>The Ghost of Abel</i>
J	<i>Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion</i>
M	<i>Milton: A Poem in Two Books</i>
MHH	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
NNR	<i>There is No Natural Religion</i>
SIE	<i>The Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i>
U	<i>The [First] Book of Urizen</i>
VLJ	<i>A Vision of the Last Judgment</i>

Parenthetical references for the poetry will include an abbreviation of the title, plate and line numbers, and the page number in the Erdman edition preceded by E. References for the prose will show the page number preceded by E.

Frequently cited works by Mikhail Bakhtin are abbreviated as follows:

PDP *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

"PSG" "The Problem of Speech Genres"

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INTRODUCTION



“OTHERNESS AS ORIGIN”

William Blake's comments about the origins of his creativity are fairly well known and often cited. His comments usually include references to other figures with whom he has conversed, and these conversations, Blake claims, provide him with inspiration for his poems. In a letter to Thomas Butts, dated July 6, 1803, he writes about a newly completed poem: "I may praise it since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary the Authors are in Eternity" (E 730). About his designs, Blake writes to Dr. Trusler on August 16, 1799, "And tho I call them Mine I know that they are not Mine being of the same opinion with Milton when he says That the Muse visits his Slumbers & awakes & governs his Song" (E 701). On May 6, 1800 Blake writes to William Hayley, "Thirteen years ago. I lost a brother & with his spirit I converse daily & hourly in the Spirit. & See him in my remembrance in the regions of my Imagination. I hear his advice & even now write from his Dictate— . . . I am the companion of Angels" (E 705). In another letter to Butts, dated April 25, 1803, Blake describes the reason for his happiness about returning to London and escaping his patron, Hayley: "That I alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoyd & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity" (E 728). Although these spirits with whom Blake claims to have conversed may have appeared to him only in his imagination, his rhetoric externalizes them, particularly when he gives them names and refers to them as others. Thus, Blake represents the figures of his imagination within the framework of conversation as outside himself and speaking to him.

Much of Blake's poetry also contains intratextual depictions of conversations between the poems' speakers and other inspirational figures. In the *Songs of Innocence*, a child on a cloud tells the piper to pipe, sing, and write happy songs that "every child may joy to hear"

(SIE 4.20, E 7). In *Europe: A Prophecy*, Blake writes explicitly, "My Fairy sat upon the table, and dictated EUROPE" (*Eur* iii.24, E 60). The speaker of *The [First] Book of Urizen* declares, "Eternals I hear your call gladly, / Dictate swift winged words" (*U* 2.5–6, E 70). *Milton's* speaker calls to the "Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song" (*M* 2.1, E 96). In *Jerusalem* the speaker explains that every morning he awakens at sunrise and sees "the Saviour over me / Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song" (*J* 4.4–5, E 146). In each of these examples, the speaker acknowledges the importance of the source of his inspiration as a dialogue with another figure. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake more explicitly elucidates the process whereby these figures and conversations are rhetorically produced. The speaker in the second "Memorable Fancy" asks the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel "how they dared so roundly to assert. that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood." Isaiah replies that he "saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in everything" (*MHH* 12, E 38). Although Isaiah did not see or hear any God in a literal or finite sense, he gives what he understands as the "infinite in everything" that "speaks" to him the name of God. He converts this imaginative response to external reality into a dialogue with a muse figure.

Yet Blake's insistence about these conversations with inspirational figures comes at a time when such a notion becomes increasingly suspect. As Timothy Clark notes, the eighteenth century ushers in the "terminal erosion of oral and formulaic conceptions of composition dominant since Homer. Thence, in Romantic and post-Romantic theories of inspiration, writers attempt to conceive the act of *written* composition. . . . in terms that often explicitly evoke nostalgia for the oral model or the communal life of an idealized Greek world" (10). As with other Romantic writers, Blake's medium is, of course, written, but his many references to a type of inspiration that has its roots in ancient oral tradition seems more than nostalgic. Blake seems, rather, to be turning to ancient tradition to restore what has been lost since the ascendancy of the written medium. The archaic oral tradition "conjures a situation that at once negates some features of the immediate environment and offers the poem as the result of a double enunciation. The song comes from both the poet and the divinity" (Timothy Clark 42), and Blake relies on this feature of addressing a muse to form the basis of his idea of inspiration and of his poetics. As Maureen N. McLane puts it,

"The authority of inspiration presupposes that poems come from elsewhere, even if that elsewhere is, as Wordsworth would have it, within" (185). Since the inspiring figures are figuratively externalized from the poet himself, inspiration is represented as dialogic, bringing other voices into the production of his discourse. Mikhail Bakhtin explains the powerful effect of this dialogic process: "Dialogue has penetrated inside every word, provoking in it a battle and the interruption of one voice by another. . . . These voices are not self-enclosed or deaf to one another. They hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another" (*PDP* 75). As these two figures, those of the poet and muse, "collaborate" in creating the poem, their different viewpoints as speaking subjects enter every word, filling the word with the dynamics of response and linking it in a matrix of dialogic communication. Even though the muse figures may be considered imaginary and thus purely rhetorical, the dialogic effect remains. As Michael S. Macovski has noted, "The rhetorical inclusion of even a mute listener implies the form of a dialogue, with its attendant notions of reception, affect, and potential for response. Indeed, the incorporation of the Romantic addressee as a metonymic listener within the text sets up the formal configuration of 'co-respondence'—the structure, at least, of a communication" (11). The muse of the imagination figuratively appears before the poet, and two voices effectively collaborate dialogically in the creation of the poem. Instead of a single voice affirming a limited point of view, Blake's discourse carries a broader perspective, because it presents itself as the product of at least two perspectives in an ongoing dialogue.

Although Blake often writes that the muse "dictates" to him, he also makes clear in *Jerusalem* that his input is essential: "When this Verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence. . . . But I soon found that . . . such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line" (*J* 3, E 145–46). In the creation of the poem, a muse may dictate the verse, but the poet here at least considers the meter. Rather than passively receiving the muse's dictates, Blake responds to them and alters them, constituting a collaborative moment. Even though he uses the term "dictation," Blake seems to insist on the double enunciation of the inspired word in a situation where "the Muses do not transmit knowledge in the sense of objective detachment in relation to a representation whose accuracy they secure. They grant a knowing guaranteed by the poet's affective surrender" to another perspective (Timothy Clark 43).¹ Blake's poems are thus framed not as the

writings of a single individual voice but rather as having their source in a dialogue that informs the poem. By investing the poem with more than one point of view, Blake abdicates univocal authority over the creative process, locating the authority for the poem in dialogue. The poetry does not just convey the limited and perhaps misleading ideas of an individual poet but carries a broader authority developed in a dialogue of more than one point of view. This abdication of univocal authority and embracement of dialogue requires, I will argue, what Blake calls “self-annihilation.”

BLAKEAN INSPIRATION AND “SELF-ANNIHILATION”

Only recently have critics examined the relevance of Blake’s statements about his conversations with figures in eternity with regard to his thinking about the communicative process. Earlier critics, like S. Foster Damon, Northrop Frye, and Morton D. Paley, tend to explain these visionary conversations more in terms of Blake’s psychology and less in terms of their poetic or linguistic function. Damon cautions readers not to make too much of these visions when he claims that “*not once* did [Blake] allow these visions any objective, or external existence” (*William Blake* 198). Frye discounts Blake’s claims that his poems were dictated to him and downplays the externality of the inspirational process: “If inspiration were anything external to Blake he would have had no choice in the matter” (*Fearful Symmetry* 38). According to Paley, Blake’s visions were a kind of metaphorical thinking that arose from the pure association of ideas rather than from a logical train of thought: “These visions are not hallucinations but neither were they fantasies—they were *seen*, but were not believed to be ‘there’ in the sense that physical objects are” (*Energy and Imagination* 202). Early commentary on Blake’s conversations with other figures thus appears more directed at normalizing the visionary and making Blake more accessible to a twentieth-century audience. Its focus is on de-emphasizing the hallucinatory quality of Blake’s visions and providing a more psychologically rational basis for his thinking. In placing Blake’s visionary comments in the context of his day, David V. Erdman notes that eighteenth-century artists, including William Hogarth and Richard Cosway, a teacher at Pars Drawing School where Blake studied, often claimed to see visions, and it is the mistake of Blake’s earliest biographers to see Blake as quaint or mystical (*Blake* 3–4). Yet while Blake’s works may have been produced from “intellectual visions” rather than “corporeal hallucinations” (Erdman,

Blake 4), his inclusion of other voices, however imaginary, rhetorically places the works within the social dynamic of address and response and undermines the appearance that his works are the isolated utterances of a single, authoritative voice. In arguing that Blake's external sources for his inspiration do not exist in any genuine sense, early critics often understate the function they perform as rhetorical constructs and poetic devices. In dismissing the existence of external voices, they help to make Blake less mad and more accessible but also neglect to assess the linguistic and poetic effects that these voices have in his thinking and poetry.

More recently, critical commentary has begun to reevaluate Blake's representations of the creative process and his comments about the sources of his inspiration. In his landmark study *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, Robert N. Essick establishes the function of muse figures in Blake's creative process: "There is no reason to question these statements as anything other than what Blake really believed he was doing when he wrote some of his major poems. . . . All these comments posit an otherness as origin, distinct from but in contact with the productive self" (160–61). As Essick astutely notes, Blake's statements maintain that his inspiration comes from a source outside, "distinct from," and other than himself. By recognizing the significance of Blake's statements about and addresses to muse figures, Essick reexamines Blake's concept of poetic production. He then goes on to state, "The otherness at the origin of Blake's texts is language itself. . . . Language is the poetic genius within and without the individual, for it is simultaneously an extra-personal system by which he must allow himself to be guided, and an intensely personal medium, a necessary means for becoming a fully human consciousness to himself and to others" (*William Blake* 161–62). Essick claims that Blake's references to muse figures point to the poet's awareness of language as a system outside the individual that governs the utterance but at the same time makes the individual utterance possible. He acknowledges Blake's insistence on the otherness at the origin of his inspiration and identifies that otherness as language.

Yet, Blake's statements and poetic addresses are directed toward specific, discrete others—to a child on a cloud in the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*, to the Eternals in *Urizen*, and to the Daughters of Beulah in *Milton*, for example—and to posit that the "otherness at the origin of Blake's texts" is "language itself" would seem to obscure the individualized nature, the minute particularity, of the addressers and addressees with the abstract category of language. Essick's approach relies on "the study of semiotics" (*William Blake* 2),

which, as Bakhtin notes, often juxtaposes, as two separate phenomena, “the utterance (*la parole*), as a purely individual act, to the system of language as a phenomenon that is purely social and mandatory for the individuum” (“PSG” 81). Such a division between the “purely individual” utterance and the “purely social and mandatory” system of language tends to obscure the social component within the individual utterance and removes it from the context of the other utterances to which it responds and from which it anticipates a response. Recent criticism bears this point out. Jules van Lieshout argues that Blake’s insistence on inspiration from other sources is an attempt to recreate the “dynamic interaction” that is the “existential mode of Eternity” (8). From the perspective of speech-act theory, Angela Esterhammer similarly describes the importance of poetic inspiration in Blake, which “posits two related moments of effectual discourse” whereby the poet receives an insight from another voice and attempts to communicate this insight to an audience (*Creating States* xiii). Saree Makdisi reminds us, “It is important to remember the extent to which [Blake] relentlessly removed himself as the grounding authority, even the author figure, in his own texts. . . . Blake’s work may in this sense be said to have been collectively authored. At the very least, this approach pushes us to bear in mind the extent to which all work is ultimately a collective endeavor rather than the accomplishment of an individual genius” (242). Indeed, inspiration traditionally recognizes the social function of the individual poetic utterances. As Seán Burke points out, “What distinguishes pre-modern conceptions of authorship is their assumption that discourse is an affair of public rather than private consciousness. . . . So far from endorsing an interiority that feeds from itself back into itself, the inspirational tradition affirms that discourse is not a private intuition but a public revelation” (xviii). Blake’s addresses to and comments about specific others, then, tap into this tradition and suggest an awareness that “any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances,” and no speaker is “the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe” (Bakhtin, “PSG” 69). Here again, every utterance, according to Bakhtin, is a response to previous utterances and anticipates future utterances in the chain of communication. Since no utterance can be isolated completely from this dialogic matrix, each one, as a response, has its source in the discourse of others. The references in Blake’s writings to other figures, in statements and in addresses, indicate a profound realization of the dialogic nature of discourse.

While much of the critical discourse has focused on the role of the imagination or inspiration in Blake, very little of it has been concerned

with the concept of self-annihilation, and nowhere has self-annihilation been linked to the dynamics of address and response. The term makes its first appearance in *The Four Zoas*, Night the Seventh, when Los attempts to unite with his Spectre (*FZ* 85.34, E 368), and appears numerous times in *Milton*, in reference to Milton's realization of his errors, and in *Jerusalem*, with regard to Los's building of Golgonooza and the awakening of Albion. It appears one other time in *The Ghost of Abel*, when Jehovah rejects Satan's call for human sacrifice (*GA* 2.20, E 272). Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi have noticed in their Blake Trust edition of *Milton* that the term may have a source in David Hartley's *Observations on Man*, the second edition of which was published in 1791 by Joseph Johnson with a portrait of Hartley for the frontispiece engraved by Blake (139n22). In the *Observations*, Hartley argues that various forms of self-interest, from grosser pursuits of pleasure and wealth to more enlightened forms involving morality and sympathy, eventually lead to self-annihilation, when the motive of self-interest is overridden by the contemplation and love of God:

The virtuous dispositions of benevolence, piety, and the moral sense, and particularly that of the love of God, check all the foregoing ones, and seem sufficient utterly to extinguish them at last. This would be perfect self-annihilation, and resting in God as our centre. And, upon the whole, we may conclude, that though it be impossible to begin without sensuality, and sensual selfishness, or to proceed without the other intermediate principles, and particularly that of rational self-interest; yet we ought never to be satisfied with ourselves, till we arrive at perfect self-annihilation, and the pure love of god. (282; pt. 2, ch. 3, sec. 5, proposition 67)

Hartley, Richard Allen argues, believes that self-annihilation "occurs when sympathy and theopathy [the feelings that arise from the contemplation of God] flow without restriction—when the person without restriction loves others and loves God" (333), or in other words, when an individual replaces his or her focus on self with a focus on others and on God. The connection between Hartley and Blake is an odd one, as Jon Mee has discussed, because Hartley arrives at the idea of self-annihilation through Lockean associationism, a philosophical system with which Blake is at odds, but the idea of removing one's focus on oneself and to direct that attention purely toward others seems to lie at the heart of both thinkers' use of the term (*Romanticism* 284).

Although the term is featured a great deal in the later poetry, it has received little critical attention. The few critics who have commented on it most often consider it in terms of the self-sacrifice and forgiveness of sins that are necessary to unite humankind in friendship and brotherhood. Mollyanne Marks links self-annihilation with the self-sacrifice of Christ as a model for Blake's characters in *Jerusalem* as they attempt to reverse the Fall. Albion, Marks notes, is moved to sacrifice himself for Los in order to restore the Divine Vision (27). She even connects self-annihilation with poetic inspiration by noticing that in the poem's invocation, the speaker of the poem asks for the Saviour's assistance in annihilating his Selfhood, which is, in Marks's sense of the term, the reason-based single vision that thwarts creativity and breeds oppression (28), so that he can create the poem (*J* 5.16–26, *E* 147). The fallen poet, she says, attempts to work through art to return humankind to Eternity and must struggle to maintain his poetic focus by annihilating his Selfhood to complete his greater task (32–33). While Marks recognizes the importance of self-annihilation for the creative process, she focuses more on how it is necessary for the poet's spiritual state but does not develop the idea in terms of how this concept actually functions in the creative process or how it affects reception. Michael Ferber characterizes self-annihilation in more political and social terms. For him, self-annihilation is necessary to break cycles of revenge, since Selfhood, which is linked to memory, tends to catalogue another's sins. Self-annihilation involves a kind of forgetting that is necessary for forgiveness (79–80). Although Ferber examines the effects of self-annihilation beyond the individual, he does not apply this idea to the social function of language or the creation and reception of poetry. In her recent book, Jeanne Moskal defines self-annihilation in terms similar to Ferber's, when she claims that it is the "constant struggle to overcome the disposition to accuse another," a necessary component of forgiveness (31). She also links self-annihilation to the work of writers and the reception of readers in commenting on Blake's forgiveness as a reader of Milton and of his own shortcomings as the writer of *Milton* and on his focus on forgiveness in the reception of *Jerusalem*. The formal literary aspects of forgiveness, and thus self-annihilation, however, are limited in Moskal to biblical typology in *Milton* and synopsis in *Jerusalem*. While each of these writers has made valuable contributions to the understanding of self-annihilation, the links to literary production and reception are not fully developed. Nor do they examine the development of Blake's thinking along these lines throughout his career.

Although the term "self-annihilation" comes late in Blake's career, the date of the Hartley edition suggests an earlier awareness, and Blake's early work does show deep concerns for the problems of forgiveness, as Moskal has shown, and literary production and reception, as Essick has shown. It is the purpose of this book, therefore, to describe the influence that the development of Blake's thinking in each area has on the other throughout his career. If Blake's concept of inspiration depends on the dynamic of address and response, a recognition of the validity of others' voices in the production of discourse is necessary for this dynamic to take place. Hartley himself makes the case that individuals within a perfect society would be united through language: "Was human life perfect, our happiness in it would be properly represented by that accurate knowledge of things, which a truly philosophical language would give us. And if we suppose a number of persons thus making a progress in pure unmixed happiness, and capable both of expressing their own feelings, and of understanding those of others, by means of a perfect and adequate language, they might be like new senses and powers of perception to each other, and both give to and receive from each other happiness indefinitely" (320; pt. 1, ch. 3, sec. 1, proposition 85). According to Allen's commentary, this "truly philosophical language" would enable individuals to communicate not only their perceptions of the world but also their inner feelings for others and thus overcome their alienation as individuals (355). The notion of self-annihilation, then, can be applied to this recognition of the dynamics of address and response in the production of discourse, since it involves a forgiveness of differences in opinion and perspective on a given subject and allows for collaboration in the construction of meaning. Ferber has noticed the importance of conversation, as opposed to contemplation, in Blake. Contemplation, he notes, is seen in Blake as thought turned inward and works against the creative process (210). In *Jerusalem*, for example, Los searches for criminals among the labyrinths of contemplation, where "all the tenderness of the soul" is "cast forth as filth and mire" (J 45.21, E 194). Conversation, however, allows for individuals to offer their own thoughts as part of a collective effort for understanding without the silencing of individual differences, as when, at the end of *Jerusalem*, fourfold humankind "conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright / Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty" (J 98.28-29, E 257). Self-annihilation allows for the conversation to take place. In terms of Blakean inspiration, the writer must relinquish univocal authority over the construction of meaning and recognize that prior speakers' and writers' words have already informed his own and that readers, upon reception of his work,

will develop their own responses that may or may not coincide with the writer's understanding of the work.

THE DISCOURSE OF "SELFHOOD"

Blake insists that his poetry must be informed by the broader perspective of dialogically inspired discourse, because he operates against what he considers to be a proliferation of discourse that lacks such an origin. Discourse that has not been developed through dialogic means comes only from the limited perspective of its author—from, in Blake's terms, the author's Selfhood. Blake uses the term "Selfhood" to describe what he considers an erroneous view of the human subject, one that thwarts dialogic communication. Blake uses the term "Selfhood" for the first time in *Milton*, and according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it makes its way into English from J. Ellistone's 1649 translation of Jakob Boehme's term *selbheit* (2717). As Bryan Aubrey explains, Boehme claims that Selfhood develops from an individual's tendency toward separateness, a tendency that is a result of the Fall. An individual asserts his or her own self-sufficiency apart from the community, or from humanity in general, and insists on being the center of his or her own world. Even though the individual demands centrality, he or she is denied the certainty of his or her centrality because every other individual can make the same demand. The Selfhood therefore becomes a position of skepticism and doubt, causing individuals to oppose, manipulate, and control others for self-preservation (126–27). In this version of Selfhood, which can readily be seen in the characters of Urizen in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and Satan in *Milton*, an individual ignores the validity of others' perspectives and seeks to promote his or her own perspective as dominant. Since language is the central means by which individuals interact with each other, it plays a significant role in the Selfhood's quest for domination.

Blake's idea of the Selfhood can be seen also as a critique of the epistemology and language theory of John Locke. Blake claims to have read Locke's highly influential *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, for which he says he felt "Contempt & Abhorrence" (E 660), and he makes such frequent references to Locke throughout his work that Steve Clark comments that Locke's work "might almost be considered Blake's dominant preoccupation" (134). We might reconsider that for Locke, all knowledge originates in sense perceptions and in reflection upon them:

In time, the mind comes to reflect on its own *Operations*, about the *Ideas* got by *Sensation*, and thereby stores it self with a new set of *Ideas*, which I call *Ideas of Reflection*. These are the *Impressions* that are made on our *Senses* by outward Objects, that are extrinsical to the Mind; and *its own Operations*, proceeding from Powers intrinsical and proper to it self, which when reflected on by it self, become also Objects of its contemplation, are, as I have said, *the Original of all Knowledge*. . . . This is the first step a Man makes towards the Discovery of any thing, and the Groundwork, whereon to build all those Notions, which ever he shall have naturally in this World. All those sublime thoughts, which towre above the Clouds, and reach as high as Heaven it self, take their Rise and Footing here: In all that great Extent wherein the mind wanders, in those remote Speculations, it may seem to be elevated with, it stirs not one jot beyond those *Ideas* which *Sense* or *Reflection*, have offered for its Contemplation. (117–18; bk. 2, ch. 1, sec. 24)

According to Locke, all knowledge derives from the ideas of either sensation or reflection, but since reflection refers to the mind's understanding of its own operations on sensational ideas, sensation forms the basis of all knowledge. No matter how "sublime," "remote," or "elevated" one's contemplations become, they are always rooted in sensational experience of the external world. Furthermore, the external world can be understood *only* through the senses: "I think it is *not possible*, for any one *to imagine* any other *Qualities* in Bodies, howsoever constituted, whereby they can be taken notice of, besides Sounds, Tastes, Smells, visible and tangible Qualities" (120; bk. 2, ch. 2, sec. 3).

Such a view of human understanding is, according to Blake, severely limited and limiting: "If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again" (*NNR* b, E 3). The "poetic or prophetic character"—the ability to perceive "more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover" (*NNR* b, E 2)—enables an individual to imagine beyond what the "Reason or the ratio of all we have already known" will allow and to see "the Infinite in all things" (*NNR* b, E 3). By relying on the senses and reason, one's understanding of the external world would be limited to perception and how the reasoning faculty alone organizes and interprets sense impressions. Since the individual's interpretive capabilities are limited to what only the senses and Reason can comprehend, the individual would, according to Blake, soon come to "the ratio of all things," or the limit of interpretation. In essence, Blake claims that reliance on only the senses and Reason would soon bring an end to the interpretation of reality and remove the possibility of any new understanding.²

Individuals, of course, are not completely isolated, since they can communicate their ideas through language. Yet Blake finds that the limitations in Locke's epistemology extend to his language theory, severely restricting the individual's use of signs. Locke's description of the word, the audible or visible representation of an idea addressed to an other, effectively points to a key division between the speaker and the listener. Words are sensible signs that indicate ideas and are necessary for communication; however, signs stand only for the ideas of the individual using the signs: "*Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the mind of him that uses them*, how imperfectly soever, or carelessly those *Ideas* are collected from the Things, which they are supposed to represent" (405; bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 2). Locke contends that signs can only represent the ideas of the individual who uses them, and that each speaker and addressee has his or her own individual understanding of ideas and the signs that represent them. Not only is the use of signs peculiar to each individual, but they also have no connection to their referents other than convention: "*Words . . . come to be made use of by Men, as the Signs of their Ideas; not by any natural connexion, that there is between particular articulate Sounds and certain Ideas, for then there would be but one Language amongst all Men; but by voluntary imposition, whereby such a Word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an Idea. The use then of Words, is to be sensible Marks of Ideas; and the Ideas they stand for, are their proper and immediate Signification*" (405; bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 1). We must bear in mind that according to Locke, the relationship between the sign and the idea it represents is an arbitrary rather than a motivated one in that no natural connection exists between the sign and the idea. Instead, the sign is only connected to an idea by a "voluntary imposition" in which "a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an idea."

Because of the arbitrary nature of the sign and of the individualized nature of ideas, Locke suggests that an individual's linguistic creativity should remain quite limited: "'Tis true, common use, by tacit Consent, appropriates certain Sounds to certain *Ideas* in all Languages, which so far limits the signification of that sound, that unless a man applies it to the same *Idea*, he does not speak properly: And let me add, that unless a Man's Words excite the same *Ideas* in the Hearer, which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly" (408; bk. 3, ch.2, sec. 8). In Locke's linguistic framework, an individual's verbal creativity is limited by the "tacit consent" that "appropriates" the sign to the signified, and if one speaks in a way that is contrary to convention, his or her words would be considered

improper and unintelligible. Nicholas Hudson points out that the central paradox in Locke's linguistic thought is that while the purpose of language is social, "its *meaning* is always private," an imperfection in all dialogue that caused Locke to encourage "an intense distrust of language" (4). Essick contends that this distrust was common in the eighteenth-century debate on language: "The proper development of language is granted to an intellectual élite who can purge language of its grosser forms" (*William Blake* 62). Such a view can be seen explicitly in Samuel Johnson's Preface to his *Dictionary* where he suggests that "linguistic freedoms must be tamed by those educated in the mastery of words" (Essick, *William Blake* 63). The imposition of convention on the signification of words, then, enforces an association between a word and an idea and curtails the individual's creativity in both utterance and interpretation at the level of the sign.

As Essick notes, Blake does not necessarily dispute Locke's claim about the arbitrary nature of the sign (*William Blake* 97), but he does resist the taming of "linguistic freedoms" (Essick, *William Blake* 63). Locke's own view of language based on individual understanding and common usage may have been the very impetus for Blake's reaction, since, as Susan Manly has shown, this same Lockean paradox sparked a radical antiauthoritarianism that was crucial to revolutionary politics and highly influential for many late eighteenth-century writers (1). So if signs stand only for the ideas of "him that uses them" and are connected to ideas only by convention, as Locke claims (253; bk. 3. ch. 2. sec. 2), the link between words and ideas is both individualized and flexible. Both speaker and listener could, therefore, be free to use signs creatively and not necessarily in a way prescribed by convention, as long as the aim of the speaker's utterance is to communicate an idea honestly to the listener and give the listener an opportunity to respond from his or her own perspective. According to Blake, the taming of linguistic freedoms is unnecessary because "No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth" and because "Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd" (*ARO*, E 1; *MHH* 10.69, E 38). As long as a speaker speaks in such a way as to be understood in attempting to represent the truth, the listener will be able to recognize and understand the truth of the speaker's discourse. The problem involving the arbitrary sign that Blake sees is not the need to limit the use of signs per se, but the need for speakers to intend truth and, more importantly, to give listeners the opportunity to respond to their utterances.

Another limiting factor of Locke's linguistic theory is the tendency of the arbitrary sign toward abstraction. As Locke describes

it, abstraction is the process that allows a single signifier to stand for many particular ideas:

If every particular *Idea* that we take in, should have a distinct Name, Names must be endless. To prevent this, the Mind makes the particular *Ideas*, received from particular Objects, to become general; which is done by considering them as they are in the Mind such Appearances, separate from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existence, as Time, Place, or any other concomitant *Ideas*. This is called *ABSTRACTION*, whereby *Ideas* taken from particular Beings, become general representatives of all the same kind; and their Names general Names, applicable to whatever exists conformable to such abstract *Ideas*. (159; bk. 2, ch. 11, sec. 9)

In Locke's formulation, the mind is able to abstract general names from particular ideas by considering the ideas as completely divorced from their particular context. The mind treats the particular ideas only as "appearances" that are "separate from all other existences" and "makes" them "become general." A particular idea that is "conformable" to an abstract idea loses its particularity as it is subsumed into an abstract general name.³ Abstract ideas are at a further remove from reality because they consolidate a multitude of different images into a single sign, yet they are affirmed as true representations of reality even though they lack the contextualization that surrounds the particular image. Yet once ideas lose their particularity through abstraction, as Essick explains, "Reality is treated as though it were merely a system of signs . . . pointing toward what the system posits as real—but which Blake believes is actually the reification of a lie" (*William Blake* 98). For Blake, who believes that "Mental Things are alone real" (*VLJ*, E 565), such an enclosed system of abstract signs that presents itself as truth is indeed no more true than any other system of signs or any other utterance for that matter, because all arise from individual interpretation. The affirmation of one representation of reality as truth, however, rejects and excludes other, potentially valid representations and curtails dialogue among them.⁴ The real problem that Blake sees with the limits that Locke would impose on the use of the arbitrary sign is the problem of an intellectual elite imposing their views on others and not allowing others to develop their own understandings through their own use of signs from the context of their own perspectives. Numerous examples of this situation abound in Blake's works. The most obvious example involves Urizen's book of law in *Urizen*, his verbal representation of Eternity, to which he expects others to conform.

Furthermore, because signs are so loosely connected to their referents and the use of signs is so individualized, the speaker could use signs duplicitously in order to manipulate a listener's understanding and divert his or her response, as in Satan's usurpation of power through the duplicitous use of signs in the Bard's Song in *Milton*. According to the Bard, Satan, through his "incomparable mildness," tricks Los into allowing him and Palamabron to change stations, and when the switch results in utter failure because of each character's unsuitability for the other's work, Satan accuses Palamabron as the reason for the failure (*M* 7.4, E 100). His words, in this case, do not attempt to represent what actually happened but rather mask his own selfishness and culpability. The problem that Blake sees with Locke's characterization of arbitrary signs, then, has to do with the limitations that Locke would impose on their use. These limitations may help to avoid the kind of exploitation of the signs' arbitrariness that Satan in *Milton* perpetrates, but they would also, in Blake's view, infringe upon an individual's ability to represent his or her version of the truth and to question the truth of another's discourse at the very level of the sign.

Indeed, as Blake notes in his annotations to Reynolds, "Lockes Opinions of Words & their Fallaciousness are Artful Opinions & Fallacious also" and that "the Fault is not in Words. but in Things" (E 659). For Blake, the Lockean formula of an objective world that can be discovered through the senses and reason does not account for the discrepancies in different individuals' perceptions of phenomena and denies individuals the chance to perceive actively and create imaginatively different versions of the world they encounter. The objective world assumption restricts an individual's creativity in the interpretation and representation of reality. Individuals are essentially compelled to affirm their views as undeniable truth because they assume that the outside world is objectively verifiable through reason. Under this assumption, an individual's utterances can only be affirmed or repudiated, since they must either correspond to the objective world and signify it directly or be in error. An individual's representation of the outside world—in spoken or written utterances⁵—must be positively affirmed and deny the possibility that alternative, competing representations could be considered valid. In such a situation, as Bakhtin explains, there can be "only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error"; therefore, "the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well" (*PDP* 81). Under these circumstances, an individual "who knows and possesses the truth"

affirms his or her thoughts not only to instruct the ignorant but also to defend them against someone else's differing thoughts, thereby maintaining "possession" of "the truth" and thus curtailing "genuine dialogue." This coercive authority is, as we shall see, the real source of error and the problem of Selfhood in Blake's work, since it presents an individual's necessarily limited viewpoint as the only possible truth. The monologic speaking subject both alienates himself or herself from others and uses discursive practices to coerce others into sharing his or her point of view. Instead of several points of view engaged in dialogue, one point of view is monologically maintained as the only acceptable one, and all others are suppressed.

Blake also considers the monologic discourse of Selfhood to be central to the power of social institutions, in particular those of church and state. As we shall see, a social institution, in Blake's view, presents and maintains a single, monologic viewpoint as a consolidation of abstract, single consciousness, and it then forces each individual member of that institution to deliver the same monologue. The members of the social institution lose their individuality as they are brought into the fold. Although Bakhtin says little about social institutions in particular, his description of the tendency of ideologies in general to subsume the individual consciousness through the monologic consolidation of consciousnesses runs parallel to Blake's concern about social institutions: "Alongside this unified and inevitably *single* [ideological] consciousness can be found a multitude of empirical human consciousnesses. From the point of view of 'consciousness in general' this plurality of consciousnesses is accidental and, so to speak, superfluous. Everything in them that is essential and true is incorporated into the unified context of 'consciousness in general' and deprived of its individuality" (*PDP* 81). Since one point of view is espoused by an ideology—or in Blake's case, an institution—as truth, any other individual point of view is repudiated, while individuals within the ideology or institution become interchangeable and "superfluous." Under these conditions, an institution suppresses the individual's potentially differing response and subsumes the individual's voice in its own monologue. The social institution "recognizes only one principle of cognitive individualization: *error*" (Bakhtin, *PDP* 81).

In Blake's time especially, an individual's linguistic freedom was considered a threat to the patriarchal hierarchy of church and state, and these social institutions acted to limit linguistic freedom. The British government was already nervous about both the political upheaval in France and the support at home for the Republican cause when Thomas Paine's second volume to the *Rights of Man* appeared,

which included an explicit call to revolution. As Michael Scrivener has noted, the government limited individual expression by intensifying censorship efforts, prohibiting meetings, and broadening the concept of treason. In addition to these governmental restrictions, a kind of propaganda movement, associated with the Methodists and Evangelists, published broadsides and pamphlets such as Cheap Repository Tracts that offered alternative reading for the lower classes to Paine's inflammatory writings ("Literature and Politics" 46, 51). According to Olivia Smith, these broadsides and pamphlets were usually designed to justify the conditions of the poor as morally right and to instruct them to accept their conditions, thereby supporting and maintaining the political establishment (75–76). David Erdman writes that pamphlets by the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers published late in 1792 and the sermon *The Wisdom and Goodness of God in Having Made both Rich and Poor* (1793) by Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff argue that the Bible teaches that the poor should accept the patriarchal system of government and that their moral and financial dependence on the rich is divinely ordained and that it was the duty of the rest of society to teach the poor about the necessity and inevitability of their situation (*Blake* 273–74). While broadsides and pamphlets intended to instruct the poor to accept their condition, they did not teach them by the exchange of ideas. As Smith points out, the pamphleteers assumed that the minds of the poor "are entirely passive and can be 'arranged' by various techniques" (73). Michael Ferber connects Locke to this discursive maintenance of establishment power: "In the *Essay* and elsewhere [Locke] makes clear that because men are not born knowing any truths, moral or otherwise, they arrive at truth by study—by observations and reasoning. This process takes time, and we are not surprised to hear that only a small class has that time. . . . From this 'natural' inequality of intellect (quite obviously social in origin) Locke can justify the aristocratic order that in fact prevailed in his day and long afterward. If you are imperfect in ethics, someone must tell you what to do" (18). This subordination of the audience as passive recipients of instruction denies individuals their own voices and coerces them to accept the monologic discourse of the church and state.

SELF-ANNIHILATION AND DIALOGIC "INSPIRATION"

Blake's response to philosophical and political monologism is to promote what he calls "inspired" discourse that is informed by dialogue

developed through self-annihilation. As it pertains to language, Blake's self-annihilation, as we have noted, involves a radical interchange between the contraries of addresser and addressee, one that removes the speaker as the univocal authority of his or her discourse and infuses it with other voices and perspectives. Through self-annihilation, a speaker acknowledges the validity of other viewpoints and resists his or her tendency to assert his or her own perspective as the only possible truth. The speaker's discourse then functions not as the single, monologic truth on a given subject but as a response to previous utterances and an invitation to future responses in the chain of dialogic communication. The strategy of self-annihilation in the creation of the utterance seeks to avoid what I will call "self-closure." This term is adapted from Blake's *Urizen*, the story of Selfhood. In this poem, Urizen separates himself from Eternity and is described as "self-closed, all-repelling" (*U* 3.3, *E* 70). In this separated state, Urizen relies solely on his own limited perspective to interpret the external world and is removed from others' perspectives. Since he ignores the dialogic nature of interpretation and linguistic representation he becomes "self-closed." This abdication of the centrality of Selfhood often seems risky, since it invites competition and even contradiction from other viewpoints, but it is necessary for communication between individuals. Once speakers annihilate their Selfhoods, they open their discourses to others' ideas, and in this sense, their discourses become dialogically inspired. Dialogically inspired discourse positions itself within a framework of address and response, thereby eliminating the author's tendency to monopolize interpretation and inducing readers to participate in the poem's creation. Such a discourse accumulates a multiplicity of viewpoints in its creation and resists finalization as new readers encounter the text.

Yet, if his project is to succeed, Blake must himself avoid the pitfalls of Selfhood in his own discourse. Otherwise, his alternative will cease to be one. To present his ideas and avoid self-closure, Blake represents in much of his work an argument or battle between the forces of self-closed and inspired discourse, chiefly by employing what Bakhtin calls "multi-voiced" genres, which set aside the central, authoritative voice of the author or narrator in favor of a multiplicity of voices that effectively collaborate in the creation of the poem. This book will explore this concern in five of Blake's works in which this struggle of authorship is foregrounded. Early in his career, Blake experiments with multivoiced genres as he explores the problem of social restrictions on language acquisition and the conflicts that arise from competing interpretive strategies. In the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, for

instance, he uses the lyric collection to examine how children attempt to establish their identities upon entering the linguistic community, only to confront institutional forces that restrict individual identity by the imposition of the institution's ideology. The individual songs in the lyric collection, most notably the companion poems, essentially speak to and against each other as they individually present some aspect of the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul," thereby inducing readers to enter the dialogue by allowing them to create their own responses to these many voices (*SIE* 1, E 7). *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which enacts an argument about biblical interpretation, employs, as we shall see, the Menippean satire genre, a genre that fragments authorial Selfhood by combining poetry and prose, realism and fantasy, and the serious and the comic, in order to keep the debate open-ended and to invite the reader's participation. Blake's later work involves less generic experimentation as it focuses more on the relationships between author, text, and reader by relying increasingly on invocations of muses to annihilate the Selfhood of the author. *The [First] Book of Urizen*, as told to the poet by his muses, the Eternals, describes the origin of Selfhood, the dissemination of self-closed discourse, and the restrictive and divisive forces that this discourse imposes. In critiquing the dissemination of self-closed discourse, Blake implicates the mass production of books and uses his own method of book production to undermine the self-closure of the utterance brought on by mechanical reproduction. Next, *Milton: A Poem in Two Books* develops the necessity of self-annihilation for authorship. Here, Milton realizes his monologic errors as he listens to a Bard and annihilates his Selfhood to recover his epic works from Selfhood and self-closure. At the same time, the speaker of *Milton* grudgingly relinquishes sole responsibility for his discourse by asking his muses, first the unreliable Daughters of Beulah and later the Lord, to aid in the creation of the poem. Finally, *Jerusalem* brings readers into the dialogue of inspired discourse by invoking them in the prefaces to each of the four books, while in the poem, Albion's Selfhood prevents him from receiving the Saviour's inspired discourse. Albion's Selfhood is eventually annihilated, allowing him to participate in a dialogue with the Saviour. While Blake's early work does not include the terms "Selfhood," "self-annihilation," and "inspired" discourse, these ideas are clearly at work and undergo development as they approach the later work, where they take full form.

Blake's inspired discourse, then, can be seen as reflecting what Bakhtin would later call dialogue. In order for a poet's discourse to be inclusive, to be more than a single, subjective viewpoint, the poet

must restrain his or her impulse toward Selfhood and engage his or her world dialogically. Without the annihilation of Selfhood, discourse becomes monologically self-closed, imposing a single, limited view on others, refusing them the opportunity to respond, and restricting their access to the creative process. Self-closed discourse denies both speaker and addressee, to put it in Blake's terms, their humanity. Through self-annihilation, Blake attempts to undo the oppression of monologism by extending the dialogue of inspiration, and hence the creative process, to his readers. Blake asks his readers to annihilate their Selfhoods so that they give themselves the opportunity to create a response to his text. Without such a response, without dialogue, humanity is reduced to "*abstract folly*" (E 716; emphasis added).

CHAPTER 1



SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND OF EXPERIENCE

CONTRARY STATES, CONFLICTING VOICES

William Blake's later writings more fully articulate the problem of self-closed, monologic discourse and the necessary process of self-annihilation that invests discourse with dialogic inspiration. However, his earlier works wrestle with these same issues as he develops the philosophic and poetic vocabulary he needs to articulate them. Among these earlier works, the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* provide a particularly telling example, because this collection of lyrics considers the ways that children acquire language, enter the community of discourse, and become shaped by social forces within that community. According to Blake, children in a state of innocence tend to consider elements in their surroundings as potential participants in dialogue. Harold Pagliaro argues that Blake shows the mind in a state of innocence as continuous with its surroundings, and Christopher Heppner finds the source for this continuity in Swedenborg's notions of Correspondences and Representatives that help Blake to formulate an idea of individual identity as not an isolated consciousness but as inclusive of its surroundings through imagination (17–18; 87). This continuity and inclusiveness, moreover, is clearly indicated in the discursive practice of speakers in the *Songs*.¹ Robert N. Essick has placed this situation into the context of the late eighteenth-century search for the originary, prelapsarian language. Essick argues that innocent speakers use signs in a way that seems incarnational and motivated—that is, intrinsically connected to their referents—and speakers in experience are self-conscious of the differential nature of postlapsarian language (*William Blake* 128). Yet the speakers' interactions with their environments seem much more immediate and particular than Essick's

abstract model would suggest. Many of the speakers of the *Songs of Innocence* enter into imaginative dialogues with nonverbal beings, like lambs, robins, sparrows, and clods of clay, and describe other such creatures, like a glowworm that “replies” to an emmet (*SIE* 26.15, E 16), and inanimate objects, like an echoing green and a rejoicing vale, as having verbal capabilities. The innocent children, as speakers, address the various nonverbal beings as if these beings were capable of understanding the children’s discourse and actively responding to it from their own perspective. Even though the addressee is, in many cases, incapable of responding or even listening, the address still carries with it the assumption of cognition and the anticipation of response. Through the rhetoric of address, Blake implies that children in a state of innocence, emerging into consciousness, engage the world dialogically to establish their identities. As Bakhtin notes, individual identity is impossible without dialogue: “I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*)” (*PDP* 287). Without dialogue, the child faces “separation, dissociation, and enclosure within the self,” which are, as Bakhtin points out, the main reasons for “the loss of one’s self” (*PDP* 287). Accordingly, children indicate through their discourse a profound and urgent personal connection between the speaker and his or her listeners, one in which each speaking subject is a participant in dialogue with an unfettered opportunity to respond.

Against the child’s attempt to establish his or her identity in the social matrix of various discourses are social institutions, the church and state in early Blake, that impose ideological conformity on its members. According to Pagliaro, this broad and institutional pressure actually filters through individuals starting with parents teaching their children, with the more experienced person passing the rules of institutional conformity, the errors of Selfhood, to the innocent, often unintentionally (44). This process spreads until individuals are trapped by the constraints of the institutional ideology. As Edward Larrissy has astutely noted, Blake is very aware of how ordinary verbal usage and artistic conventions are at the very heart of this process (*William Blake* 19). Indeed, a social institution, according to Bakhtin, presents its ideas as unquestionable truth, and an individual, instead of responding freely, must adopt the monologic discourse of the social institution—or repeat it from memory, as Blake would say—because any contrary or modifying response

would be repudiated as erroneous (*PDP* 69, 81). In the *Songs*, the coercive forces of institutional discourse impose linguistic and psychological barriers of Selfhood around speaking subjects and force individuals to accept passively the point of view of the institution, denying them the opportunity to respond dialogically. They then lose their individuality as speaking subjects as they reiterate the institution's perspective.

Against these coercive social forces, Blake tries to inject dialogue through the discourse of the inspired poet. As Blake suggests in the introductions to the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*, as he does in much of his later work, dialogue informs the production of inspired discourse and provides the addressee with the opportunity to respond freely to it, thereby including the addressee in the dialogue and thwarting ideological imposition. Blake dramatizes the moment of inspiration in the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* when a child appears on a cloud and tells the piper to pipe, sing, and write his songs, functioning as a muse figure, a voice external to the piper's own that aids in the production of the poem. Once the poem is invested with the voice of this other figure, it is open to more than the single, limited view—the Selfhood—of the poet, thereby preventing the monologization of the poem's discourse. Conversely, the "Introduction" to the *Songs of Experience* dramatizes the moment of reception, as the Bard addresses the lapsed soul, calling it to respond to him and including his addressee in the dialogue. Both introductory poems, however, also expose underlying problems with this model, suggesting that such a dialogic ideal is elusive. The child-muse leaves the piper before he sits down to write in the "Introduction" to *Innocence*, giving the piper the opportunity to monopolize the discourse of the poem, and the reaction to the Bard by Earth in "Earth's Answer" raises questions about whether the Bard has sufficiently set aside his authority over his discourse or whether he ever can in the eyes of his addressee. Still, these introductions provisionally offer an alternative to institutional monologism and Selfhood by proposing a dialogically inspired discourse that not only includes the voices of others in its production but also elicits a response from the others who receive it.

The *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, then, explore how children in a state of innocence attempt to engage their world imaginatively and dialogically but are confronted by the rigid and limiting ideologies of the church and state. Against these discursive restraints, Blake proposes a discourse developed through dialogue, thus averting the coercive power of the controlling Selfhood in both its production and reception. Even without the term "Selfhood," Blake's early work

involves itself with this problem. The lack of the term “Selfhood” at the early stage of Blake’s career, as W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, should draw the reader’s attention to the problem and reflects just “how much more imaginative exploration [Blake] would have to engage in before a way out could be articulated” (*Blake’s Composite Art* 87). This chapter will attempt to show the early stages of Blake’s “imaginative exploration.”

INNOCENCE AND THE EMERGENCE OF DIALOGUE

Emblematic among the *Songs of Innocence* of the innocent child’s attempt to connect to his or her surroundings through dialogue is “The Ecchoing Green.” All events depicted in this poem, including utterances, work together in a dialogue of responses that speak across the differences between humankind and nature, youth and age, event and word. Essick goes so far as to write that the entire world becomes semiotic as each event echoes and refers back to every other (*William Blake* 107–8). Here, Blake describes the children’s tendency to develop dialogic relations linguistically with their environment, and the speaker of the poem, one of the children playing on the green at whom the “old folk” laugh (*SIE* 7.15, E 8), immediately develops these connections:

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells chearful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green. (*SIE* 6.1–10, E 8)

The child’s description of the events in this stanza transcends logical categories and brings together linguistically what would otherwise be accidental and independent occurrences. When the sun rises, it acts directly upon the sky to make it “happy,” an adjective indicating that the sky can respond to the sun interactively and emotionally. The bells seem either to initiate or respond to the change of seasons since they ring for the purpose of welcoming the spring—to ring it in. Then, the birds, the voices of nature, sing louder, in concert with the

ringing bells. While all of this occurs, the children play on the green. Although the children playing coincides only temporally, the accumulation of simultaneous events is later connected more strongly when the speaker says later in the poem, “The sun does descend, / And our sports have an end” (*SIE* 7.23–24, E 8), creating a final, linguistic link between the action of the sun and that of the children. Even the title of the poem, with the double “c” in “Ecchoing,” an archaism by Blake’s day, typographically imitates the sound that the word represents and reiterates the dialogic communion of all aspects of the child-speaker’s world, which he or she builds through language.

As the poem continues, the speaker makes another verbal connection between youth and age as the “old folk” laugh while watching the children play, but this connection also points out that the old folk have lost the ability to make the dialogic connections with their world that the children make:

Old John with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play
And soon they all say.
Such such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Ecchoing Green. (*SIE* 6.11–7.20, E 8)

Old John and the other adults sit beneath the oak, and as they laugh at the children’s play, they reminisce about their own youthful sport. As they respond to the children, they notice echoes of their past selves. While the word “such,” echoed in line 17, points strongly to the similarity between the carefree youth of the “old folk” in the past and that of the children in the present, it points to differences between youth and age in the present. The “old folk” are saying that they once felt such dialogic relationships with their world but no longer do. They can only look at the children and remember, but they cannot now respond to the world as they once did as children themselves. As the sun descends in the third stanza ending the day of sport, the children return to their mothers ready for rest, but the descent of the sun also anticipates the time when innocence will end and the youth will become the “old folk” who stand apart from their surroundings instead of engaging them in dialogue. This anticipated change in point of view is also marked by

the last line of the poem, “On the darkening Green” (*SIE* 7.30, E 8), which disrupts the repetition of “Ecchoing” in the last line of the first two stanzas, bringing both the poem and the time of innocence to a close. The speaker’s discourse displays the kinds of unselfconscious links that children build between themselves and their surroundings, but it also betrays the fragility of those links formed only through verbal constructs, however imaginative and unifying they may be.

The verbal relationships that children construct between themselves and their surroundings and the limitations of those constructs are also developed in companion poems in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The two poems entitled “Nurse’s Song” show the reaction of an adult speaker, the nurse, to the dialogue of innocence. In the *Innocence* version, the nurse hears the children playing and responds with a sense of satisfaction that all is well, but as the sun sets, she calls the children home:

When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still

Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
And the dews of night arise
Come come leave off play, and let us away
Till the morning appears in the skies. (*SIE* 24.1–8, E 15)

The nurse’s responses to her surroundings depend, as her language indicates, on temporal and transient relationships only. She is content “when” she hears voices and the laughing of children, but when the sun goes down, she expects the children to stop playing and return home until the sun appears again. Furthermore, her responses imply a distinct linguistic separation between herself and the outside world. The sun goes down, and the dews arise, but these events are only temporally connected to her concern for the children. One event neither initiates nor responds to the other.

The children, however, reply from their dialogic perspective of linguistic interconnection:

No no let us play, for it is yet day
And we cannot go to sleep
Besides in the sky, the little birds fly
And the hills are all coverd with sheep. (*SIE* 24.9–12, E 15)

Even though the sun has gone down, some light does remain, making the children unable to sleep. Rather than accepting the sunset as a purely temporal signal that it is time to return home, they respond according to the natural relationship between the light and their inability to sleep. The children also imitate what the animals do. Since the birds and sheep have not yet ended their day with sleep, the children feel that, according to the example before them, they should not either, suggesting a connection with other creatures who respond to the light in a similar way. Upon hearing their answer, the nurse agrees to let their play continue:

Well well go & play till the light fades away
 And then go home to bed
 The little ones leaped & shouted & laugh'd
 And all the hills ecchoed. (*SIE* 24.13–16, E 15)

The nurse's reply indicates that her judgment still depends on temporality, since she allows the children to play "*till* the light fades away"; however, through the dialogue in which the nurse and the children have engaged, the nurse accommodates the children. The accord that is established by her accommodation is indicated in the last line, which animates the hills with verbal capability. Instead of the children's voices echoing in the hills, the hills themselves echo. The dialogue between the children and their guardian not only highlights the closer association that children have with their environment but also allows individuals with different understandings of the same environment to negotiate a mutual understanding through dialogue. In this case, the Nurse relinquishes at least some of her authority to accommodate the children and to foster this unity among the differing viewpoints.

The "Nurse's Song" of *Experience*, however, contains no such negotiation and demonstrates, instead, an act of authority that stifles dialogue:

When the voices of children, are heard on the green
 And whisperings are in the dale:
 The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
 My face turns green and pale.

Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
 And the dews of night arise
 Your spring & your day, are wasted in play
 And your winter and night in disguise. (*SIE* 38.1–8, E 23)

The laughing of the children in the *Innocence* version has turned to whisperings in this version, indicating that much of what the nurse hears is inaudible or incomprehensible. The way that innocence anthropomorphizes and unifies the world through language is incomprehensible to the Nurse of *Experience*. Since the children's understanding of their environment, based on linguistic connections and dialogic relationships, is completely alien to the nurse, she cannot reconcile it to her temporal, more isolated understanding. She then uses her position of power over the children to forestall any dialogue that might produce an accord between the different points of view. She tells the children to end their play and allows no discussion of her decision, as did the nurse of *Innocence*, excluding their voice completely from her song, denying them the position of speaker, and relegating them to silence. She forces the children to accept her temporal association between the descent of the sun and the end of play, coercing them into accepting her point of view and following her orders. Through the juxtaposition of the companion "Nurse's Songs," Blake shows the unifying power of dialogue and the coercive power of monologic authority.²

In some of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the dialogic discourse of innocence goes beyond simply describing inanimate or nonhuman objects capable of dialogue. Instead, the speakers of these poems, such as "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," actually address such objects directly to engage them in dialogue; the dialogue in these poems is dramatized rather than narrated. Such dialogue is risky, however, because the speakers assume that their addressees are capable of a reply and may naïvely expect too much of imagination. In "The Lamb," the child's address takes the form of a question in which the child asks, "Little Lamb who made thee / Dost thou know who made thee" and who "Gave thee such a tender voice, / Making all the vales rejoice!" (*SIE* 8.1–2, 7–8, E 8). As Susan Hawk Brisman and Leslie Brisman have noted, the speaker's innocence is indicated by his or her freedom to converse with animals and to assume that the animals and the rest of creation are capable of responding (67). The concluding two lines of the stanza, repeating the first two exactly, seem at this point to reinforce the speaker's assumption that the lamb is capable of a response, that it is capable of participating in dialogue. Indeed, this repetition suggests that the speaker seems to insist upon an answer, lessening the likelihood that the question is only rhetorical with no answer expected.

The answer to the question comes in the second stanza and involves a triple identification through names that give each of the three figures, the child, the lamb, and Christ, an equal opportunity

to participate in dialogue, thereby removing the linguistic privilege of any one figure over the others and the power to curtail dialogue:

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
 Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
 He is called by thy name,
 For he calls himself a Lamb:
 He is meek & he is mild,
 He became a little child:
 I a child & thou a lamb,
 We are called by his name.
 Little Lamb God bless thee.
 Little Lamb God bless thee. (*SIE* 8.11–20, E 9)

Christ calls himself a lamb, and the speaker of the poem equates himself or herself, the lamb, and Christ through the association of this name. Essick writes that this treatment of names is “quasi-etymological,” since the answer assumes that the relationships among words are keys to extralinguistic, ontological knowledge, an assumption commonly made in eighteenth-century linguistics (*William Blake* 112–13). Even though names are part of the system of difference that is language—a system that distinguishes different things with different names—they carry with them a source of underlying identity, which the child in the poem seems to find. By addressing the lamb and by associating it through names with himself and Christ, the child is able, at least in his or her own imagination, to bridge a physical gap between himself or herself and everything else that the child is not. Furthermore, when the speaker explains that Christ “calls himself a Lamb” and that He is called by the lamb’s name, he depicts Christ as a speaker in dialogue, since He addresses Himself and is addressed by others as a lamb. The child, moreover, brings Christ into the dialogue by asking Him to give His blessing to the lamb. Not only are the three figures identified by the same name, but this identification suggests that they have equal access to dialogue. None of the figures, no matter how lowly or exalted, coerces the others into accepting his or her ideas. In the world of innocence, at least, each speaker has equal opportunity to participate and respond.

As in “The Lamb,” the speaker of “The Tyger” addresses a tiger and asks about the addressee’s Creator, but in contrast, the way that the question is asked is radically different, undermining the very logic of the answer in “The Lamb.” The speaker of “The Lamb” poses his or her question with previous knowledge as if he or she were quizzing

the lamb; the speaker of "The Tyger" does not know the answer to the question asked, nor does he or she seem to expect a response. To the speaker of "The Tyger," dialogue is out of the question. Instead of the assured tone of the speaker of "The Lamb," this speaker's own incessant questioning conveys a sense of skepticism that his or her final doubts about the tiger can never be answered. This doubt also emerges in the echoed last two lines of the first and last stanzas: "What immortal hand or eye, / Could[/Dare] frame thy fearful symmetry?" (*SIE* 42.3–4, 23–24, *E* 24–25). By the end of the poem, the speaker's tone seems to change from disbelief to outrage at the audacity of the Creator who has made such a monster. Also, the idea that the tiger is "framed" in his "symmetry," rather than given life as was the lamb (*SIE* 8.3, *E* 8), suggests that his Creator has built impenetrable boundaries between separate, individual creations, boundaries that make dialogue impossible. The speaker's penultimate question, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" (*SIE* 42.20, *E* 25), finally severs the linguistic links that the speaker of "The Lamb" had built through names. The introduction of the tiger into the logic of the association of names is a new term that has no linguistic connection to either the speaker or the Creator. This reality disrupts what the imagination has constructed with language in "The Lamb."

Ultimately, the speaker of "The Lamb" answers his or her own question (the lamb, like the tiger, does not speak in the poem), and this fact points to the speaker's naïveté that such a dialogue is possible without the human speaker imposing his or her ideas on the mute listener. According to Alan Richardson, the form of "The Lamb" follows the catechistic method of late eighteenth-century education, which uses questions and memorized answers to enforce orthodoxy and class distinction. The use of the catechistic method in children's books and in books for uneducated adults was widespread and was designed to replace popular forms of literary entertainment with a more regularized program of moral rectitude and to counter radical, political tracts like those of Paine with conservative political and religious ideas. Because the speaker's answers describe the Creator as childlike and not as the almighty Father, however, his or her answers are more subversive than doctrinal, thereby undermining the authority of catechistic discourse (66–67, 74). In commenting on the use of the catechistic method in children's literature, Richardson cites Bakhtin, who recognizes that this kind of "interaction of a teacher and a pupil . . . can only be a pedagogical dialogue," which amounts to "philosophical monologism" (*PDP* 82). On the one hand, Blake uses the catechistic form to subvert authority, but on the other hand,

the speaker's use of this form in addressing the lamb, imitating the catechistic method, could also indicate the potential for the monologization of the child's discourse as he or she enters experience. The child is now asking questions and anticipating a "right" answer, however subversive. Presumably, though, the child will eventually be corrected to supply the answer acceptable to the church when he is the respondent and an adult is the teacher-questioner. Also, by using this catechistic method himself, the child displays the tendency of those in authority to impose their own viewpoint on others, thus repeating and sustaining the process of ideological indoctrination and control. Indeed, the child's urge to transcend imaginatively the impenetrable boundaries between individual creations is confronted with realistic linguistic limits of dialogue. "The Tyger," then, exposes at least the child's dialogic strategy, if not the urge to dialogue itself, as naïve, albeit innocent.

The urge of children to deploy language imaginatively to speak across the difference between themselves and their surroundings and to produce a communion of dialogic relationships is an admirable one, as Blake shows in such poems as "The Echoing Green." He also indicates the weaknesses of this discursive practice, however, since the child-speakers are unaware that their apostrophic addresses may be the very practice that causes the imposition of a powerful speaker's point of view on a weaker listener and since they, as listeners, easily fall victim to the monologic tendencies of more powerful, experienced speakers.

EXPERIENCE AND THE DISRUPTION OF DIALOGUE

In many of the *Songs*, Blake shows how the fragile connections children build between themselves and their world with language are open to the coercive forces of institutional discourse, which act to thwart children's efforts to create dialogic union among the elements of their world and herd them into adopting the single perspective of the social institution. As Blake demonstrates, these forces begin from the moment of birth, the point at which each individual enters society and the network of various discourses. The first encounter an individual has with society is in the family, but since parents have already been affected by the influence of church and state, these institutions reach through the parents to control their children. The eighteenth-century teachings of both church and state emphasize the acceptance of one's station in life no matter how miserable and offer an afterlife as the ultimate reward. Marilyn Gaull describes the methods of the late

eighteenth-century church and state in handling the poor as not only charitable assistance but also the protection of their own hegemony. Even though the rewards for the poor were, in many ways, intangible, the religious association of the efforts for the poor made them beyond reproach, and the state assisted the church in its efforts because they tended to keep the poor under control (6). In his discussion of "Holy Thursday," David Fairer shows how the mindset behind the charity schools and other efforts to help the poor worked to uphold the power of the aristocracy and to maintain a class of abject laborers. He quotes the Bishop of Norwich, who in 1755, told the Charity Schools Anniversary Meeting, "There must be drudges of labour (hewers of wood and drawers of water the Scriptures call them) as well as Counsellors to direct, and Rulers to preside. . . . These poor children are born to be daily labourers, for the most part to earn their bread by the sweat of their brows. It is evident then that if such children are, by charity, brought up in a manner that is only proper to qualify them for a rank to which they ought not to aspire, such a child would be injurious to the Community" (qtd. in Fairer, "Experience Reading Innocence" 543). Such a ruling ideology denies individuals the opportunity even to question their conditions—that is, to respond dialogically to the institutional assertion of the "truth" behind the status quo—controlling them by making them adopt the ideology of the church. When the individual repeats the monologic, self-closed discourse of church and state, he or she is no longer an individual speaking subject connecting with other speaking subjects through dialogue but becomes instead another mouth through which the institutions themselves speak. The individuals listen and repeat what they hear, but they do not speak themselves.

Blake's "London" serves as a witness to the effects that institutional pressures have on individuals. The speaker walks through the city's "charter'd" streets and marks "in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe" (*SIE* 46.1, 3–4, E 26). Both Edward Larrissy and John B. Pierce have shown that the poem serves as the speaker's interpretation of the London he encounters, since his marking indicates not only his notice of his surroundings but also his verbalizations of his notice (*William Blake* 43–44; 50). Most of what the speaker notices, though, are the vocalizations of the people he encounters:

In every cry of every Man,
In every infant's cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear. (*SIE* 46.5–8, E 27)

The weakness and woe the speaker hears reside in the voices of individuals, which are manacled. Caught within the web of institutional discourse, their utterances are governed and controlled by its coercive power, against which they can only cry in pain and fear. The speaker then specifies two social institutions at the root of this problem: the church and the state:

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse. (*SIE* 46.9–16, E 27)

The speaker blames the church for the chimney sweeper's cry, the state for the soldier's sigh, and both institutions, through their rules governing marriage, for the harlot's curse. Indeed, the joint institutional control over marriage could, at times, put individuals in a double bind. David V. Erdman describes a situation in 1781 that ironically illustrates this joint control: "By a [1781] ruling in the Court of King's Bench the wording of the Marriage Act of 1751 was interpreted as making void all marriages performed in chapels erected since passage of the [1751] act" (*Blake* 62). The ruling temporarily created chaos, since it invalidated thirty years of marriages, until it was overturned through legislation. As the poem demonstrates, the "bans" and "charters" of these institutions literally deny the people a say in their own lives, except to utter a cry, sigh, or curse. The question left by the poem is how this institutional power and class division came about, a question that occupies much of Blake's work.

As an answer to the question raised by "London," "The Human Abstract" describes how the controlling power of institutional coercion works, marking one of Blake's earliest attempts at defining the problem in theoretical terms. The poem begins by describing the parasitic nature of pity and mercy:

Pity would be no more,
If we did not make somebody Poor:
And Mercy no more could be,
If all were as happy as we. (*SIE* 47.1–4, E 27)

Both pity and mercy depend on the existence of poverty and unhappiness, as well as on a division of social class, which Blake exposes on a grammatical level. The first-person plural pronoun includes both the speaker of the poem and the reader in a group that is neither poor nor unhappy and distinguishes this group from the “somebody” else who is both. “We” automatically implies a separate “they” and produces an overly wide breach that hinders dialogue. Those capable of dispensing pity and mercy have already excluded the others, whom they make poor, by referring to themselves with the first-person plural pronoun.

This linguistic and social division produces the necessary conditions for monologic control:

And mutual fear brings peace;
Till the selfish loves increase.
Then Cruelty knits a snare,
And spreads his baits with care.

He sits down with holy fears,
And waters the ground with tears:
Then Humility takes root
Underneath his foot. (*SIE* 47.5–12, E 27)

The speaker of the poem explains that each class’s fear of the other prevents conflict between the two until the “selfish” desire to possess what the other has overrides the tenuous peace. Although it is not clear from these lines which group wants what, the reader may assume that the lower class, the poor and excluded group, wants the happiness that the upper class, marked by the inclusionary “we,” possesses. The poem then switches from the first-person plural to the more abstract third person when Cruelty appears and knits snares, spreads baits, and with “holy fears,” he raises the tree of Humility from beneath his foot. This tree “Soon spreads the dismal shade / Of Mystery” and “bears the fruit of Deceit” (*SIE* 47.13–14, 17, E 27). These actions of the figure Cruelty depict a scene of oppression, but the agents and objects of that oppression are missing. The “we” and “they” of the first stanza have been elided into a series of allegorical abstractions that are formed not in nature but in “the Human Brain” (*SIE* 47.24, E 27). If the upper class, to which the speaker belongs, is trying to keep the lower class from taking the benefits that it desires, the upper class would, in all likelihood, not want to implicate itself as an agent of oppression. The speaker’s switch from first-person plural to the more abstract third person linguistically removes the upper class, including

the speaker, as the agent of oppression. By shifting blame from itself to an abstraction, the upper class is also able to limit a response by the lower classes, since concrete individuals cannot argue with an abstraction. This shift to an abstraction amounts to a monologization, moreover, that the upper class expects the lower class to accept.

The allegory of Cruelty that the speaker uses itself describes the oppression by means of monologism. Read as a parallel to the speaker's own deceptive use of language, however unconscious that deception may be, and as a model of discourse as a means of social control, the snares that Cruelty knits and the baits that he spreads can be seen as the building and dissemination of discursive power. By investing his linguistic construct, his discourse, with "holy fears," he gives it the authority of religion, which is used to produce humility in those who are ensnared by this discourse. Humility, in the strategy of social control, requires listeners to accept the discourse of Cruelty without questioning or critiquing it, leaving a "shade of Mystery" about the discourse:

Then Humility takes its root
Underneath his foot.

Soon spreads the dismal shade
Of Mystery over his head;
And the Catterpillar and Fly,
Feed on the Mystery.

And it bears the fruit of Deceit,
Ruddy and sweet to eat;
And the Raven his nest has made
In its thickest shade. (*SIE* 47.11–20, E 27)

This shade indicates the uncritically accepted meaning that lies behind the language of Cruelty's discourse, a meaning that is built on deceit and allows the parasitic, opportunistic flies, caterpillars, and ravens to manipulate it to their own advantage. As a model of self-closed discourse and social control, the poem suggests that the social institution, in coercing listeners to accept the "truth" of its discourse, robs the individual of a chance to engage in dialogue and an opportunity to confront institutional power. The social institution is an abstract entity that no one can address, but its abstraction can be used as a platform from which to issue dictates and as a cloak to disguise culpability. The actions of the figure of Cruelty are strikingly similar to

those of Urizen in *The [First] Book of Urizen* and Satan in *Milton*. The illustrations to “The Human Abstract” and the final plate, plate 28, of *Urizen* also indicate the similarity visually. Both Cruelty and Urizen are depicted as aged figures who ensnare themselves in the nets they themselves create (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). While this model is one Blake will explore more fully in later poems, it is already outlined in “The Human Abstract.”

The coercive forces of self-closed, institutional discourse begin their work from the moment an individual enters society, that is, from the moment of birth. At birth, one enters the family, and the first

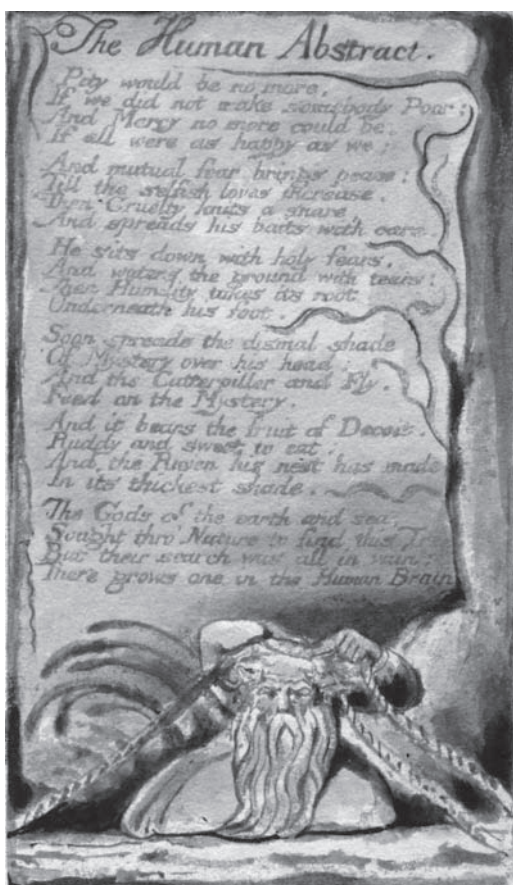


Figure 1.1. “The Human Abstract,” *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy Z, plate 47 (Erdman plate 47), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Library of Congress.



Figure 1.2. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 28 (Erdman plate 28), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Library of Congress.

encounter one has with language is the receipt of a name. In “The Lamb” and “The Tyger,” as I have noted, Blake suggests that for children attempting to establish their identities within a community of discourse, names tentatively aid in building linguistic links between the child-speakers and their addressees, until they are confronted with

other names that sever those fragile links. In “Infant Joy” and “Infant Sorrow,” Blake examines how children receive their names. “Infant Joy” begins with what appears to be a dialogue between an infant and another figure, possibly a parent:

I have no name
 I am but two days old.—
 What shall I call thee?
 I happy am
 Joy is my name,—
 Sweet joy befall thee! (*SIE* 25.1–6, E 16)

In a short dialogue in which a child represents himself or herself to an addressee for the first time, a two-day-old infant gives himself or herself a name based on his or her emotional state. The dialogue disappears, however, in the second stanza:

Pretty joy!
 Sweet joy but two days old,
 Sweet joy I call thee;
 Thou dost smile.
 I sing the while
 Sweet joy befall thee. (*SIE* 25.7–12, E 16)

The disappearance of the child’s voice in the second stanza and the unlikely situation of a two-day-old child using language suggest that the only speaker of the entire poem is the other figure looking at the child and substituting his or her voice for the child’s. Essick writes that the action of this poem, that of giving a name, explores the very nature of language in humans. The speaker gives a name to the infant based on the infant’s defining characteristic, his or her smile. In a sense, the infant names himself or herself as the adult translates what the child says through gestures, but the speaker goes beyond merely naming the child. In the last line of each stanza, the speaker bestows a wish for joy to befall the infant named Joy, moving from gesture to name to abstraction. Rather than establishing the child’s individual identity, the naming process has instead placed the child into an abstract category (*William Blake* 109–10). Yet because the infant’s “smile” may not necessarily be a signifier of joy at all, since two-day-old children are incapable of smiling, the speaker could thus be imposing on the child his or her adult interpretation of the child’s facial gesture. Indeed, as Nelson Hilton has noted, the word “infant” comes from

“*in-fans*” or speechless (“I” 29), so the name is affixed to the child without the child’s input. One’s name is given and is, therefore, an introduction into the socializing influences of language.

This potential becomes more apparent in light of the speaker of “Infant Sorrow” who, upon leaping into the dangerous world, pipes loudly but receives no verbal response from either parent:

My mother groand! my father wept.
 Into the dangerous world I leapt:
 Helpless, naked, piping loud;
 Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my fathers hands:
 Striving against my swadling bands:
 Bound and weary I thought best
 To sulk upon my mothers breast. (*SIE* 48.1–8, *E* 28)

The child “pipes” loudly upon entering the “dangerous world,” but instead of reassuring words initiating the child to the community of discourse, only incomprehensible groans and weeping confront the child. Unable to communicate, the infant feels “bound and weary”; his only recourse is to stop struggling and “sulk upon [his] mothers breast.” Without linguistic connections, children can neither make their wishes known nor represent themselves in dialogue. Instead, they are subject to the ability of their parents to interpret accurately their gestures and actions and respond to them linguistically and dialogically. Even before children can communicate, they must struggle against monologization.

Children struggle against such monologization because only through dialogic relationships can they develop identity. As new consciousnesses entering a society already filled with established and competing voices, they must situate themselves not only as listeners but also as speakers. They must make themselves heard in order to exist. Bakhtin describes this importance of dialogue for identity: “In dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is—and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. This dialogue cannot and must not come to an end. . . . Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (*PDP* 252). Without dialogic interchange, individual identity ceases to exist, as several child-speakers in the *Songs* learn. The children in “The Little Boy Lost” and “The Little Girl Lost”

experience the loss of identity when dialogue is severed. In "The Little Boy Lost," the boy calls to his departing father, "Speak father, speak to your little boy / Or else I shall be lost" (*SIE* 13.3–4, *E* 11). According to the boy, the father's voice will keep the boy from losing his way. When the father leaves, their dialogue is severed, and the boy does indeed become lost and isolated, a nonidentity as "away the vapour flew" (*SIE* 13.8, *E* 11). In "The Little Girl Lost," Lyca has wandered off to hear birds sing, following the voice of nature. She finds herself alone, however, and speaks to herself about her predicament, wondering how her parents are reacting:

Sweet sleep come to me
Underneath this tree;
Do father, mother weep.—
Where can Lyca sleep.

Lost in desert wild
Is your little child.
How can Lyca sleep,
If her mother weep.

If her heart does ake,
Then let Lyca wake;
If my mother sleep
Lyca shall not weep.

Frowning frowning night,
O'er this desert bright,
Let thy moon arise,
While I close my eyes. (*SIE* 34.17–32, *E* 20)

In Lyca's address to "sleep," she shifts from referring to herself in the first person to the third person: from "Sweet sleep come to me" to "Where can Lyca sleep." Moreover, when she does refer to herself in the third person, she seems to lose track of herself in relation to her addressee. As she mentions her parents in her address to "sweet sleep," she refers to herself as "*your* little child" instead of theirs. The only addressees she has are "sweet sleep" and "frowning night," ones that are produced through imaginative linguistic constructs but in reality cannot respond. Without a parent to respond in dialogue, she loses her sense of identity. In both companion poems, "The Little Boy Found" and "The Little Girl Found," dialogue is restored as the children are

returned to their parents but only through acts of supernatural intervention, suggesting both the urgency of the need for dialogue and the improbability of its restoration.

Many speakers of the *Songs*, such as those in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* and "The Little Black Boy," hope for supernatural or divine intervention that will restore dialogue, but as they confidently express the eventual fulfillment of their hopes, the reader notices, more gravely than do the speakers, that the possibility for divine intervention comes only after death. As noted earlier, the eighteenth-century church and state taught a rigid morality of prudence, restraint, and self-discipline and that one's reward for bearing one's poverty would come in the afterlife. While the aim of many of the authors of these ideas was to improve the situation of the poor, they also had the effect of countering some of the politically subversive literature of the day and preventing unrest among the poor. Ironically, as Blake shows, the very people for whom these ideas are oppressive often adopt them, even though they are against their own self-interest. As the church and state affirm these ideas as truth, they expect their listeners to accept them passively. When the listeners do, they repeat the institutional monologue and lose their status as participants in dialogue. As with the catechistic forms of "The Lamb" and "The Tyger," Blake rewrites and incorporates the literature for children and the poor both to subvert dialogically the monologic authority of these forms and to expose the process of the monologization of the individual's voice within these forms.

This monologization occurs in both "The Chimney Sweeper" and "The Little Black Boy." Like the speakers of "The Little Boy Lost" and "The Little Girl Lost," the speaker of "The Chimney Sweeper" has been separated from his parents before a dialogue with them can be established:

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,
Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep.
So your chimney I sweep & in soot I sleep. (*SIE* 12.1–4, E 10)

At the time the father sells the child, the child's tongue was still unable to form the "s" in sweep, suggesting that the boy had not fully developed his ability to use language before he was separated from his parents, nor had he been able to establish his identity through a dialogic relationship with them. Yet, as the poem goes on to reveal, he is now beginning to adopt the very discourse that social institutions use to

condone and justify his mistreatment. In Tom Dacre's dream, all the sweeps are "lock'd up in coffins of black" until an angel, who tells Tom, "If he'd be a good boy, / He'd have God for his father & never want joy," sets them free (*SIE* 12.12, 19–20, E 10). Although the dream provides the hope of escape from the sweeps' oppressive conditions, this escape comes only after death. In a monologic repetition of the angel's statement, the speaker proclaims that the motto of the dream is "If all do their duty, they need not fear harm" (*SIE* 12.24, E 10). As Harriet Kramer Linkin has noted, the angel's words are structured in the conditional to elicit good behavior from the children, and the speaker, who reinforces these words in the motto, has internalized the false logic of social institutions. Just as the eighteenth-century church sanctions the oppression of children and controls their behavior with the promise of paradise, the children accept the very logic and language that oppresses them (6–7). Larrissy emphasizes that the speaker is unaware of the subtle coercion in the Angel's teaching and that his limitation is fostered by the Angel (*William Blake* 23). The social institution replaces the child's own voice with its controlling monologue in the child's counsel to others.

The monologism of the church's teachings is more clearly exposed in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience*. Instead of a monologue that parrots the discourse of social institutions, this poem contains a dialogue in which the speaker addresses a chimney sweeper and asks him where his father and mother are. The child then describes his plight to the speaker:

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winters snow:
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy, & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery. (*SIE* 37.5–12, E 22–23)

As the child explains to his interrogator, he once lived like the children of "The Ecchoing Green" in communion with his surroundings, "happy upon the heath" and "smiling among the winters snow." "Because" he was happy, however, his parents dressed him "in the clothes of death" and taught him "to sing the notes of woe," thereby perpetuating the monologism of the eighteenth-century

church, replacing the child's "happy" state with the ideology of intangible rewards for those who suffer, an ideology designed to suppress the unrest among the poor. They think "they have done [him] no injury" because the sweeper remains happy beneath the burden of these trappings, which nevertheless do cause him misery. His critical awareness of the source of his misery, indicated in his indictment of "God & his Priest & King," suggests that he speaks his own mind and does not simply mouth the words of self-closed discourse. His continued happiness is due to his ability to represent himself dialogically as an individual to the speaker of the poem and his resistance to institutional monologization.

This same advice given to children and the poor was also exported throughout the colonies, and Blake parodies it in "The Little Black Boy." As Richardson explains, some of the same groups teaching docility and acceptance of the status quo to children and the poor in England took their ideas overseas to instruct the nonwhite colonized people (157). In "The Little Black Boy," the speaker explains what his mother has taught him about the consequences of his skin color. While the English child is "white as an angel," he is "black as if bereav'd of light," even though he believes his soul is white (*SIE* 9.2–4, E 9). His mother has explained that this difference will be reconciled in the afterlife:

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear
The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice. (*SIE* 9.13–10.18, E 9)

The mother's advice suggests that the black body provides shady relief from the intensity of God's love until their souls learn to bear it, yet their bodies also form an impediment to the reception of God's love. Only after the clouds of their bodies disappear will they hear God's voice. They are, therefore, prevented from engaging in dialogue with God until after the deaths of their bodies. Furthermore, because she mentions only black bodies as an impediment to this dialogue, she unwittingly implies that white bodies do not impose a similar barrier to such a dialogue. As the chimney sweeper is taught to believe that his reward for bearing the injustice of his servitude will come in the afterlife, so the little black boy learns that his "reward" for bearing his black skin will come in the afterlife.

After repeating his mother's advice, the little black boy then describes what he would tell the English boy:

When I from black and he from white cloud free,

Ill shade him from the heat till he can bear,
 To lean in joy upon our fathers knee

And be like him and he will then love me. (*SIE* 10.23, 25–26, 28, E 9)

While the black boy extends the idea of the body as a cloud to include the white body of the English child, the white boy's body apparently proves to be neither a source of relief from nor an impediment to the beams of God's love. The white boy does not have to learn to bear the beams until he dies, nor does he have to wait for a reward because the black boy will do the work of shading him in the afterlife. That the black boy will shade the white boy suggests that the soul of the black child is still black like the "shady Grove" his body was. The black boy's soul, therefore, is still different from that of the white boy. Also in the illustration to plate 10, it is the white child that speaks with God, pictured as a shepherd, while the black child stands to the side, suggesting that the dialogue that the black boy's mother promised might not take place, or if it does, only secondarily. Even though the black boy is taught that the differences in skin color will be erased in the afterlife, the poem and its illustration indicate that he will be shut out from a place in the human community by institutional monologism. As with the chimney sweeper, the advice he learns, and then passes on, as a defense against his social condition contains the very logic that will keep him and his listeners in that condition. His independent voice has been replaced by the institution's monologue.

Not only does the institution's monologue infiltrate the voices of individuals, but whenever an individual attempts to question a representative of a social institution, he or she will not find responses, which require dialogue, but coercion designed to force the questioner into accepting the institution's dictates and to keep other potential questioners silent. In "A Little Boy Lost" of *Experience*, a child questions a priest about his teachings on the love of others:

Nought loves another as itself
 Nor venerates another so.
 Nor is it possible to Thought
 A greater than itself to know:

And Father, how can I love you,
 Or any of my brothers more?
 I love you like the little bird
 That picks up crumbs around the door. (*SIE* 50.1–8, E 28)

The first stanza, addressed to a priest, operates as an argument challenging the idea that one must love others more than oneself, which the priest has apparently taught the boy, but the boy, however, questions the possibility of doing so. Even though the boy may privilege the self over the other, he does not suggest that this privilege should come at the other's expense. As an example, the boy draws a comparison between his priest and "the little bird / That picks up crumbs around the door," which reenacts the kind of imaginative identification, the dialogic connection, that children often make with elements in their surroundings, as described in "The Lamb." In this identification the child expresses as much delight in the bird who comes to the door to pick up discarded crumbs of bread as in the priest who gathers in orphaned children. Instead of replying to the boy's questions and responding to him in dialogue, the priest instead places the powerless boy on an altar to be consumed by fire:

The Priest sat by and heard the child.
 In trembling zeal he siez'd his hair:
 He led him by his little coat:
 And all admir'd the Priestly care.

And standing on the altar high,
 Lo what a fiend is here! said he:
 One who sets reason up for judge
 Of our most holy Mystery.

The weeping child could not be heard.
 The weeping parents wept in vain:
 They strip'd him to his little shirt.
 And bound him in an iron chain.

And burn'd him in a holy place,
 Where many had been burn'd before:
 The weeping parents wept in vain
 Are such things done on Albions shore. (*SIE* 50.9–24, E 28–29)

The priest never directly replies to the boy's questions, but while the boy is on the altar, the priest misrepresents both the boy as a "fiend"

and the boy's questioning and his imaginative comparison as "reason" set up "for judge / Of our most holy Mystery." Rather than responding to the boy, the priest uses the concept of Mystery as a strategy of obscurantism to put an end to the dialogue that the boy initiated. Like Cruelty in "The Human Abstract," the priest expects his parishioners to accept the church's monologue passively and uncritically so that institutional power can be maintained. Once the dialogue is stifled, "the weeping child [cannot] be heard," and "the weeping parents [weep] in vain." The irony of the line "And all admir'd the Priestly care" suggests that, much like Cruelty, the priest keeps his parishioners under his powerful foot by planting humility in their minds through his display of terror. His power begins with his refusal to allow the boy to question the self-closed discourse of the institution that the priest represents. Dialogue must be stifled so that monologism can maintain its hegemony.

In the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Blake has presented his view of the way that power is built and maintained by social institutions through monologic, self-closed discourse. As abstract entities that cannot be addressed, they issue laws governing ordinary human conduct, enforce them strictly, and refuse to respond to questions about their laws. This refusal amounts to a rejection of dialogue, the necessary component of human interaction through language, and the imposition of the institution's own discourse on the tongues of individual speakers. Once individuals adopt and repeat the institution's monologue, they in turn continue to support the institution's hegemony and its power over them. With a moral code of patience and restraint and the promise of an afterlife, the monologue of church and state, the main target of the *Songs*, can entice the very people it intends to control to accept their socioeconomic condition, no matter how impoverished, and even expect them to support the status quo by passing on its promises and ideas to others. Like the children in "Holy Thursday" of *Innocence*, the multitude of individuals are herded into the structure of the social institution to sing its songs in one voice (*SIE* 19, E 13). They are expected, like the speaker of "The School Boy," to give up the "sweet company" of a dialogic relationship with their world and, "under a cruel eye outworn," memorize and repeat the discourse of organized religion (*SIE* 53.5, 8, E 31). Once their individual voices are lost and replaced by self-closed discourse, the individuals themselves become part of the abstraction.

THE PIPER AND THE BARD: TOWARD THE RESTORATION OF DIALOGUE

While the *Songs* depict the conflict between the emerging voices of innocence and the controlling, authoritative voices of experience, the introductory poems at the beginning of each section insert the poet into this conflict and develop his role in it. As both Angela Esterhammer and John B. Pierce have noted, these introductory poems are especially significant because they develop an image of how the poet creates his discourse, its sources of inspiration, and its role in the verbal exchange with readers (Esterhammer, *Creating States* 124; Pierce 24). These introductions, furthermore, are an early attempt in Blake's career to establish the poet as a restorer of dialogue to the larger world of discourse. The historical context of the *Songs* helps to situate the poet in such a liberating role. The *Songs of Innocence* of 1789 and the combined *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* of 1794 appear at a time when literature for children was taking a prominent place in the English cultural dialogue as one of the most contentious issues of the age (Richardson 2). The texts were widely disseminated and their authors well known. According to Janet Bottoms, teachers, social reformers, artists, intellectuals, and parents all had their own positions on children's education and argued them vehemently. The various approaches of the rationalists, evangelicals, and religious conservatives differed widely, but most were suspicious of any tendency to appeal to children's imaginations. Instead, they were utilitarian in nature and favored useful knowledge. In the stories of Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Sarah Trimmer, for example, children were always under the careful watch of adult supervision and directed toward a specific lesson of moral virtue and piety (213–15). As Heather Glen puts it, "[The authors] did not rouse the child's capacities for wonder: they told him how to think" (17). In choosing the genre of the children's book of lyric poems, Blake offers his *Songs* as a response to these influences and tendencies.

The influence of the literature produced for children, moreover, had a much broader effect since it served as a model for literature written to help promote literacy among the poor. For example, hymns written for children were a popular genre in the mid to late eighteenth century used in the literacy effort (Shrimpton 20–22), as were Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts*, her easy-to-read poems that developed simple narratives about how the poor classes could improve their lives by remaining humble, thus carrying out God's work. Not only were these forms used to inspire children to lead a godly life

and to help the poor to improve themselves, they also attempted, as Richardson notes, to counter other texts that sought to promote democratic and antimonarchical ideas to the poor like the subversive tracts of Thomas Paine (31). While Hannah More was widely seen as innovative for her efforts to bring literacy to the poor (Saunders), she and her circle were distressed by the political and social implications of the revolution in France. As Mona Scheuermann describes, the bishop of London prompted More to enter the pamphlet wars of the 1790s initiating the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, and while her beliefs and activism were sincerely aimed at improving the situation of the poor, that improvement, in her view, required that the upper classes retain their ascendancy and that the poor remain in their place in the social hierarchy (4). The socializing power of children's literature and the literature for the poor helped to maintain the status quo by stifling creativity, personal independence, and upward mobility.

Of course, Blake is likely to have been familiar with the children's literature trade, since between 1780 and 1791 he was commissioned three times by Joseph Johnson to produce engraved illustrations for children's books (Glen 9; Leader 1–4; Miles 181), so it is no coincidence, then, that Blake uses the genre of the lyric poem collection as a way to participate in the cultural debate. Since Blake's intended audience is likely not to have been children or the poor but middle and upper class adults (Glen 9–10), Blake uses the genre itself as a vehicle for critique. As Glen notes, most readers would have been accustomed to work like Cowper's with the poet's controlling voice shaping the attitudes of the readers from poem to poem. Blake, however, offers a set of poems where the controlling authorial voice is undermined because the use of opposing perspectives throughout the work calls assertions into question and creates a subtly articulated critique of the traditional children's lyric (5, 19). Tilottama Rajan supports Glen's view by exploring the generic characteristics and publication history of the *Songs* to show that the *Songs* force readers to read not progressively through the book from front to back but to retrace one's steps and reread the poems against new juxtapositions of lyrics. Blake, says Rajan, produced a set of poems that not only "failed to resolve themselves into a system," but he also forced readers to consider "the very processes of interpretation and institutionalization," drawing "writer and reader in a process of cultural self-understanding" (199). This process thwarts the authorial tendency to control the writer-reader interaction and allows readers to come to terms with their own assumptions and to create their own understanding about the place of children in late eighteenth-century culture and its institutions.

Not only do the generic characteristics of the *Songs* free readers from the controlling tendencies of the authorial voice, but the introductions themselves, as representations of authorship, also critique the function of the author in the creative process and in the process of dissemination and through this critique introduce a dialogic component to the moments of inspiration and reception. In the "Introduction" to *Innocence*, a piper sees a child on a cloud who directs him to write his songs that "every child may joy to hear" and thereby establishes the role of dialogue in inspiration and poetic production, as dramatized in the poet's relationship with a muse figure (*SIE* 4.20, E 7). In the "Introduction" to *Experience*, a Bard emphatically addresses a listener to emphasize the dialogic relationship between poet and audience, thereby including the audience in the dialogue of inspiration. Both introductions taken together develop the role of dialogue in both the creation and reception of inspired discourse. As a restorer of dialogue to society, the poet relinquishes monologic authority over his discourse and accepts other voices in its formation. This acceptance of dialogue, what Blake would later call "self-annihilation," opens the poet's discourse to other voices, contextualizing itself within the preexisting discursive community, and anticipating, even calling for, the responses of its audience. Blake does, however, express some ambivalence about the success of this project in these early poems because he questions the poet's ability to overcome his own lapses into self-closure and the addressees' abilities to break out of their passive acceptance of monologic discourse and respond to the poet's inspired discourse. Even though Blake doubts the success of his project, he nevertheless continues the struggle to undo the bondage of Selfhood through inspiration, a struggle that is central to the *Songs* and to Blake's entire poetic career.

The "Introduction" to *Innocence*, we may recall, opens with a child appearing on a cloud before a piper. When the child appears, he asks the piper to "pipe a song about a Lamb," to "sing [his] songs of happy cheer," and to "write [them] / In a book that all may read" (*SIE* 4.5, 10, 13–14, E 7). The piper then responds to the child by obliging him or her, and the child responds to the piper with delight in his creations. This conversation between a muse figure (a child on a cloud) and a figure of the poet (the piper) represents the process of inspiration as a dialogic one in that the imagination is figuratively externalized from the poet himself and brings another voice into the production of his discourse. The muse of the imagination "appears" before the poet, and the two collaborate dialogically to create their discourse. In fact, it is the request of the child-muse that initiates the

authoring of the poem, not the will of the piper-author, as Maureen N. McLane notes (217). By rhetorically representing the creative process as dialogic, with two voices involved in poetic production, Blake hopes to avoid the type of controlling authorial voice that pervades much of the children's literature and literature for the poor in his day. Instead of a single voice affirming a limited point of view as the first and last word on a given subject—as ultimate truth—inspired discourse appears as the result of a dialogic collaboration between poet and muse and is, to use Bakhtin's term, "double-voiced." In double-voiced discourse, as Bakhtin explains, "Dialogic relationships can permeate inside the utterance, even inside the individual word, as long as two voices collide within it dialogically" (*PDP* 184). Inspired discourse, then, presents itself as the product of at least two points of view in an ongoing dialogue, and each word carries within it these two frames of reference. Instead of positioning himself as the ultimate, monologic authority on a given subject, Blake's inspired poet is but one contributing voice in the dialogue.

The dialogue of inspiration is crucial to Blake if the language of poetry is to provide an alternative to the monologue of institutional discourse. As we have seen, the discourse of the social institution allows for only one voice that all must accept and repeat. Cruelty, of "The Human Abstract," like Urizen in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, spreads his *own* baits and snares, his self-closed discourse, and he uses holy fears and deceit to coerce his listeners into humbly accepting his dictates. The priest of "A Little Boy Lost" uses the shade of Mystery to thwart attempts to unsettle the authority of the established church's interpretation of "the holy book," on which its power depends. Without a rigidly enforced, singular monologic voice, the centralized power of the social institution would collapse, leaving everyone to have his or her say. The origins of muse-inspired poetry, however, are not so self-centered. Since the very moment of inspiration is a dialogue between poet and muse, the central authority, the Selfhood, of the poet is displaced and the center from which power could be built is removed; the authorial Selfhood is annihilated. While the poet is author, or executor, of the poem, the poem begins as a collaboration in which both muse and poet have a say, thus avoiding the monologic, that is, self-closed, nature of institutional discourse from the very start of the poem.

Blake, however, displays ambivalence about this strategy of inspiration and its effectiveness, as has been noted by several critics. The problem begins when the child tells the piper to write his songs:

Piper sit thee down and write
 In a book that all may read—
 So he vanished'd from my sight
 And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
 And I stain'd the water clear,
 And I wrote my happy songs
 Every child may joy to hear. (*SIE* 4.13–20, E 7)

When the piper begins to write, the child vanishes. While both Essick and Esterhammer see little evidence for an ironic reading of the replacement of song with writing (*William Blake* 182–83; *Creating States* 129–30), Mitchell, Larrissy, and McLane each find it problematic that the speaker is unaware of the incongruity in the idea of children reading a book to hear his songs, suggesting that the withdrawal of the child and the switch to writing may indicate a corrupting of the orally produced song (“Visible Language” 55–56; *William Blake* 26; McLane 217). The historical contexts of the *Songs*, furthermore, reinforce the ironic undertones, given the tendency of children’s literature to impose on readers an ethos through a controlling authorial voice. The source of the poet’s inspiration leaves him when he commits their dialogue to writing. The hollow reed and the staining of the water could, then, indicate the loss of dialogue in the absence of the muse and, therefore, a corruption of dialogue. These ironic undertones point to the possibility that even the poet’s inspired discourse could become monologic, even though its origins are in the dialogue of inspiration. While the poet is alone during the writing of his songs, much like Urizen is when he writes his metal books of moral law, he must guard against imposing his Selfhood on the muse-inspired discourse and avoid turning dialogue into monologic ideology. Writing in and of itself does not necessarily present more of a problem than speech; the problem lies in how the speaker situates himself or herself—as a central, monologic authority or as a participant in dialogue. When the muse leaves, the rhetorical structure of addresser-addressee leaves as well. This disappearance of the muse gives the poet the chance to put himself in the position of authority over the discourse; he is now in a position either to render the inspiration in its double-voicedness or to distort it deceitfully into any ideology he alone wants to disseminate. While Pierce notes that orality appears to win out in the end (49–50), the speaker of the “Introduction” to *Innocence* seems unaware of the potential corrupting forces of composition without the benefit of a collaborative muse.

While the “Introduction” to *Innocence* dramatizes the exchange between muse and poet pointing to the dialogic nature of inspiration, the “Introduction” to *Experience* moves to the next stage in the process of the artistic event: the reception of the poet’s discourse by an audience and its consequent response. Also, as several critics have indicated, the ambiguity about the nature of communication and the corrupting influence of monologism pervades this introduction as it does the previous one. As presented in the poem, a Bard, who claims already to have received some form of exceptional knowledge and, perhaps, authority derived from that knowledge, attempts to convey this received knowledge to an audience, the lapsed soul, whom he also calls “Earth”:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past, & Future sees
 Whose ears have heard,
 The Holy Word,
 That walk’d among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul
 And weeping in the evening dew:
 That might controll,
 The starry pole;
 And fallen fallen light renew! (*SIE* 30.1–10, E 18)

As Esterhammer argues, the infinitive “to hear” that ends the “Introduction” to *Innocence* becomes a command as it opens the “Introduction” to *Experience*, indicating that the bard is positioning himself as a figure of authority. The fact that his knowledge comes from the “Holy Word” also suggests that he is the first speaker of *Experience* who derives his authority from ideology and, therefore, thwarts dialogue (*Creating States* 136–43). Leader sees the Bard as a figure of the Old Testament prophet who has lost sight of the humanity inherent in innocence, as indicated by the wings on the child in the frontispiece to *Experience*, which seem to turn the human child on a cloud into an iconic, religious symbol (132–33, 149–40). As the Bard attempts to draw his listener’s attention to his own voice, however, he may also be presenting himself as one who is inspired in the dialogic sense. He begins by claiming to be informed by a variety of temporal perspectives at once, “Present, Past, & Future,” even though his own frame of reference is the present, as indicated by the present tense *sees*. More importantly, he claims to have heard “The

Holy Word,” the reference to hearing suggesting that the Bard has received the Holy Word through the dialogic process of poets and prophets, when a muse or other invoked, external figure appears and delivers a message. Such a process would, in effect, bypass the institutional interpretation of the “Holy Book” and provide the Bard with a more direct understanding without the aid of intermediary priests and their “shades of Mystery.” Of course, this moment of inspiration does not take place within the poem itself, as it does in the “Introduction” to *Innocence*. As is the case with most texts, the moment of inspiration is never seen by the reader, and any reader of any text is always confronted with the problem of the author’s motives for delivering his or her message. The “Introduction” to *Experience*, then, depicts the other side of the creative process, which is also dialogic: an audience’s reception of and response to the poet’s discourse, with all the attendant ambiguity that exists in the writer-reader transaction.

Indeed, while the message that the Bard attempts to convey to his audience is one of awakening, the message is not readily received. According to the Bard, the lapsed soul is one who “*might* controll, / The starry poll; / And fallen fallen light renew,” but she is apparently unaware of her potential (*SIE* 30.8–10, E 18; emphasis added). He then calls on the Earth to “arise from out the dewy grass,” but the Earth turns away, rejecting the Bard’s attempt to include the Earth in the dialogue of inspired discourse (*SIE* 30.12, E 18). The Bard, however, refuses to let the Earth exclude and isolate herself:

Turn away no more:
 Why wilt thou turn away
 The starry floor
 The watry shore
 Is giv’n thee till the break of day. (*SIE* 30.16–20, E 18)

By noting the Earth’s action of turning away and questioning it, the Bard incorporates the Earth’s silent rejection as an interruptive response to his own discourse. This last stanza, then, acts as a separate utterance responding to the Earth’s silent rejection. The Bard maintains the dialogue, which had begun with inspiration from a muse, in the dissemination of his discourse, even though the Bard’s audience has not spoken. Earth’s silent rejection is characteristic of the agonistic responses of Romantic auditors. As Macovski has noted, “Indeed, *what is most striking about Romantic auditors is that they are agons*, that they effect an epistemology of opposition.

Although the addressivity of the utterance posits an interlocutor's reception, Romantic dialogue offers a countervailing 'response' in which a listener misjudges, denies, or recoils from a perspective narrator. . . . Dialogue signifies a broader set of rhetorical interactions that proceed despite verbal imbalance, conflict, and agonism" (24). While speakers and listeners may fail to communicate, dialogic exchange continues. Moreover, the Earth's inclusion into dialogue is not coerced, as it would be in monologic, self-closed discourse, because the Earth is free to respond as she wishes, even to reject the Bard's message. The passing on of a message derived from dialogic inspiration, like the moment of inspiration itself, must take place through open dialogue so that verbal interaction does not become coercion. The dialogue that inspired the Bard extends to his audience, broadening the scope of dialogue and potentially widening the circle of inspiration. With the "Introduction" of *Experience*, Blake dramatizes the moment at which an audience receives the poet's discourse and portrays it as a dialogic one.³

The dialogic nature of the relationship between the inspired poet and audience is further enhanced by "Earth's Answer," which follows the "Introduction" in every copy of *Experience* (E 792). "Earth's Answer" functions as a direct response to the introduction both because of Blake's consistent placement of the poem in *Experience* and because after the Bard speaks and addresses Earth in the previous poem, the lapsed soul then reacts and confronts the Bard:

Earth rais'd up her head,
From the darkness dread & drear.
Her light fled:
Stony dread!
And her locks cover'd with grey despair. (*SIE* 31.1–5, E 18)

Although Earth is caught in darkness, dread, and despair, she raises up her head following the Bard's address as if his words have caught her attention. The state in which Earth finds herself is very much like the oppressive state of Selfhood. The absence of light and the reference to weighty materiality in "stony dread" anticipates the opacity of Selfhood, which allows the isolation of individuals within distinct and separate bodies to curtail dialogue. Although some separation is necessary for distinct individual voices to exist in dialogue, Blake consistently views material, bodily separation as a barrier against dialogue, as a separation sometimes too difficult to bridge and one easily monologized.

In the second stanza, Earth then produces her own utterance:

Prison'd on a watry shore
 Starry Jealousy does keep my den
 Cold and hoar
 Weeping o'er
 I hear the Father of the ancient men

Selfish father of men
 Cruel jealous selfish fear
 Can delight
 Chain'd in night
 The virgins of youth and morning bear.

Does spring hide its joy
 When buds and blossoms grow?
 Does the sower?
 Sow by night?
 Or the plowman in darkness plow?

Break this heavy chain,
 That does freeze my bones around
 Selfish! vain!
 Eternal bane!
 That free Love with bondage bound. (*SIE* 31.6–25, *E* 18–19)

After reiterating her condition, Earth claims that she hears “the Father of the ancient men” who is “selfish,” “cruel,” and “jealous” and who is, apparently, the cause of her condition. This Father has attributes similar to Blake’s other oppressive figures such as Cruelty in “The Human Abstract,” Urizen in *Urizen*, and Satan in *Milton*, all of whose coercive power derives from the monologization of discourse. Earth then questions the Father about the logic of keeping her in darkness and commands him to “Break this heavy chain” of bondage. Since she claims to hear the Father even though the Bard is the one who has addressed her, she might be hearing the Bard and mistakenly identifying his voice as that of the Father and addressing him as such, or she might be first addressing the Bard, telling him that she hears the Father, and then turning to question the Father about her bondage. In any case, the Bard’s prompting has caused Earth to raise up her head out of the darkness and to confront her oppressor in a dialogic process. Her incessant questioning and her command to the Father seem designed to provoke a response, to draw the Father into dialogue,

and to loosen his tyrannical control over her. These two poems, taken together, show the nature of dialogue in the world of experience. The exchange is fraught with ambiguity, contention, and misapprehension, yet as Pagliaro has explained, both the Bard and Earth want to overcome their isolation (35). While the address and response are contained in two separate poems, the dialogue takes place across their boundaries. Through the Bard's dialogically inspired discourse and the Earth's reaction to it, Blake suggests that the relationship between poet and audience is a dialogic one designed to pry the audience out of the grip of an oppressive monologue.

The kind of response that the Bard would like to see from his audience, and Blake from his readers, can be found in "To Tirzah." In this poem, the speaker addresses Tirzah, "Mother of My Mortal Part" who

With cruelty didst mould my Heart.
And with false self-deceiving tears,
Didst bind my Nostrils Eyes & Ears.
[And] Didst close my tongue in senseless clay. (*SIE* 52.9–13, E 30)

Tirzah appears as a figure of oppression who with cruelty and deceit has controlled the speaker's ability to perceive and interpret by binding his or her "Nostrils Eyes & Ears" and who prevents dialogue by enclosing the speaker's tongue in "senseless clay." The speaker, however, asks, "Then what have I to do with thee?" thus confronting his oppressor and provoking a response to release himself through dialogue (*SIE* 52.16, E 30). While some are able to extract themselves, the Bard continues to call others still mired in darkness and to widen the circle of dialogue. As he says in "The Voice of the Ancient Bard,"

Folly is an endless maze
.....
How many have fallen there!
They stumble all night over bones of the dead;
And feel they know not what but care;
And wish to lead others when they should be led. (*SIE* 54.6, 8–11, E 31–32)

Those who themselves stumble in darkness, who are mired in the monologue of Selfhood, lead or govern others through "clouds of reason / Dark disputes & artfull teasing" (*SIE* 54.4–5, E 31). He calls them to "see the opening morn, / Image of truth new born," which

is continuously reinvented through endless dialogue (*SIE* 54.2–3, E 31). His mission for his discourse, the dialogically inspired poet's art, will not end until all are freed from the monologue of self-closed discourse. As the speaker of "The Laughing Song" indicates, all can "live & be merry" when every individual is engaged in "the sweet chorus" of dialogic inspiration (*SIE* 15.11–12, E 11). Until then, the piper and the Bard continue to sing.

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CHAPTER 2



THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL

DIALOGUE AND "IMPOSITION"

In the *Descriptive Catalogue*, William Blake writes, "Tell me the Acts, O historian. . . . Tell me the What; I do not want you to tell me the Why, and the How; I can find that out myself, as well as you can, and I will not be fooled by you into opinions, that you please to impose, to disbelieve what you think improbable or impossible" (E 544). In this passage regarding interpretations of history, Blake wants historians to tell him only "the Acts," the events that have occurred in the past, but not the historians' opinions on why or how those events might have occurred. He does not want to be told what to think; rather, he wants the freedom to respond to the events themselves to develop his own understanding of them from his own unique perspective. Blake distrusts the historians' theories because they tend to "impose" their theories on their readers as truth, even though their claims that events are "improbable or impossible" are nothing more than unproven "opinions." Instead of passively accepting the historians' imposed theories, their "already found, ready-made irrefutable truth," as Bakhtin would call it (*PDP* 110), Blake prefers to discover his own version of the truth by responding directly to the events that the historians present, the "What," in order to develop his own, equally valid, understanding of causes and means, the "Why, and the How." Blake's statement on how he wants historians to write is a declaration that interpretation, including the interpretation of events, is a dialogic process. Such an interpretive process, what Bakhtin calls "creative understanding," puts the writer (the historian, in this case) and the reader (Blake) on equal footing, where each has an equal opportunity to participate in the discovery of truth.

According to Bakhtin's concept of creative understanding, an individual's interpretation of another's discourse is a dialogic response necessarily colored by the interpreter's unique perspective. As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson point out, "One cannot become a mere duplicate of the other through total empathy or 'fusing' of horizons; that could add nothing truly new. Nor should one 'modernize and distort' the other by turning the other into a version of oneself. Both these alternatives, which are often seen as the only possible ones, reduce two voices and two perspectives to one" (99). Merely duplicating or repeating the other's discourse through "total empathy" nullifies any insight that the individual might bring to bear through the interpretive process, yet the imposing pressure of monologism often provokes such a passive response. Likewise, the distorting of another's discourse into a version of one's own ignores the differences in the other's viewpoint and imposes an alien context upon it. Neither situation allows for the differences among individual utterances, and when the existence of a single authoritative truth is assumed, the differences in the other's discourse are viewed as erroneous. Alternatively, creative understanding allows for the differences among individual speaking subjects and gives rise to potential new meanings: "Works always contain more potential meanings (but not every conceivable meaning) than the author and his contemporaries know. Such potentials are activated in unexpected ways by later generations or different cultures in a process of creative understanding, in which a dialogue is produced between the work's potentials and the interpreter's unforeseeable and unique perspective" (Morson and Emerson 415). Rather than repeating another's discourse or distorting it into a version of one's own, an individual engages another's discourse dialogically. Creative understanding not only preserves individual differences but also promotes new interpretations that, because of generational and cultural differences, are also valid. Because of the uniqueness of his cultural and generational context, Blake wants historians to give him the freedom to uncover these potentials from his own perspective and not to restrict him or reduce his perspective to their own.

Blake's argument against imposition in the interpretation of history functions as a response to the imposing pressure of monologic discourse that was especially acute in England during the French Revolution and the years immediately following. As Ib Johansen explains, the English debate on the French Revolution was also an argument about the political and social functions of linguistic and rhetorical codes and on the powers and responsibilities of the

speakers in the debate. "What was at stake," writes Johansen, "was no less than the political control of language itself—or to put it another way, the efficiency (legitimacy) of *rhetorical power*" (43). In this debate, the conservative Establishment, which wrote in support of the French aristocracy, strove to maintain the legitimacy of its rhetorical power, and monologism was its weapon. The one writer who dominated the debate from the conservative side, supporting and protecting the Establishment's hegemony, was Edmund Burke. According to Michael Scrivener, Burke's *Reflections*, with its extravagant rhetoric and emotional oratorical style, was part of Burke's attempt not only to enlist support of parliament and the upper classes, the part of the population that made up the political nation in Burke's mind, but also to stifle both the Jacobins and the general public discourse. For Burke, the Jacobins wanted to destroy the centuries of tradition and practice that created the constitutional monarchy and English political establishment, and Burke's object was to control both political debate and cultural power (*Seditious Allegories* 43–47). Burke's extravagant rhetoric, moreover, enabled him to occupy what Stephen Prickett calls "the linguistic high ground" and establish the *Reflections* as "the authoritative and historically-sanctioned interpretation of the Revolution" (12–13). Of course, Burke's own hyperbole may have been the very spark that ignited the fierce backlash against the *Reflections* (Scrivener, "Literature and Politics" 48), but the power and influence of the *Reflections* are difficult to overestimate. Saree Makdisi explains that the assumption of Burkean linguistic authority is evidenced by the shock with which government spies and reformers used when they reported on the articulateness and rhetorical power of many of the reformers' arguments. The establishment view was that the revolutionaries must be of lower class and therefore of lower intellect, but to their surprise, they discovered that many of the radicals had rhetorical skill equal to Burke's (50). William St. Clair adds that once Paine's *Rights of Man* was outlawed and withdrawn, the *Reflections* remained standing as the preeminent statement on the French Revolution and for many people the only text they had read on the subject (257).¹ Burke's *Reflections*, therefore, take on the appearance of irrefutable, "ready-made" truth and stymie any future response before it can even be uttered. Burke and the conservative writers thus put themselves in the position of what Bakhtin refers to as "someone who knows and possesses the truth [who] instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error" (*PDP* 81). When the conservative pamphleteers addressed their audience, whom they viewed as irrational and intellectually

inferior, they expected them to accept their political discourses passively and without response. As Bakhtin explains, "In [such] an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousness is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well" (*PDP* 81). The only "response" to these discourses is to repeat them unchanged and unchallenged from memory, because they are uttered as objective truth. To respond contrarily to them or to modify them is to contradict their "truth."

Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, however, attempts to demonstrate how such a contrary response can take place against a discursive hegemony by undermining its exclusive, monologic hold on discourse without itself resorting to monologism. Using Emanuel Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell and Their Wonders as Heard and Seen by the Author* as its foil, much of the *Marriage* is staged as a debate about biblical history between Angels, "the religious" whom Blake aligns with conservative supporters of monologic orthodoxy, and Devils, "the diabolical" who question the Angels' interpretation of biblical history by imagining a viable alternative interpretation, thus overturning the exclusive authority of "the religious" position. The parody of Swedenborg is obvious, not just in the title, but also with the use of the "Memorable Fancies" that parody Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations," which serve as concluding proofs for his chapters, and the direct challenges to Swedenborg on plates 3 and 21–22. The internal religious debate within the *Marriage*, furthermore, has a connection with the external political debate, as Richard Cronin has shown. As is widely known, Blake had visited the General Conference of the Swedenborgians in April of 1789 and may have initially had some interest in their views. By the time the *Marriage* was written, however, he and other members of the Joseph Johnson circle, like Joseph Priestley and Thomas Paine, were expressing contempt for the Swedenborgians because the Swedenborgians had abandoned Swedenborg's original vision emphasizing individual liberty and human divinity, adopted their own hierarchical priesthood, and expressed support for the established church and the crown (48–50). The *Marriage* is, in a sense, Blake's attempt to deinstitutionalize Swedenborg through dialogic means. Toward the end of the *Marriage*, the debate ends in the final Memorable Fancy with an Angel who is able to recognize the validity of the Devil's competing understanding of biblical history, and the two "often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense" (*MHH* 24, E 44). In the *Marriage*, monologic discourse that imposes itself on its audience is exposed as just one point of view or interpretation among many, and

active imagination and creative understanding are presented as the necessary faculties for this process.

The *Marriage* also indicates, however, that the avoidance of imposition is, at best, difficult and perhaps impossible. About this problem Edward Larrissy has argued that while Blake is asserting a particular political argument in the *Marriage*, he is also expressing a fear of pushing his view too hard, a fear that manifests itself in the *Marriage*'s peculiar form (*William Blake* 98). Tilottama Rajan has also pointed out that since Blake's ideological analysis in the *Marriage* focuses on perspectives as linguistic constructs, Blake is motivated to scrutinize his own linguistic practices, as well (215). At the end of the debate in the last Memorable Fancy, when the Angel is consumed in the Devil's fire, their perspectives merge, and the differences that would have allowed for creative understanding seem to disappear, raising the possibility that the Devil's argument could be just as imposing as the Angel's. If, as Bakhtin suggests, different voices are necessary for dialogue to occur, then such an erasure of differences could suggest imposition and monologization. Indeed, after the speaker of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" takes an Angel to see his "eternal lot," and the Angel says, "Thy phantasy has imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed," the speaker replies, "We impose on one another" (*MHH* 20, E 42), admitting that the persuasiveness of his argument is as coercive as the Angel's and, therefore, as imposing. In presenting his alternative interpretation of biblical history and the Angel's place in it, the speaker knows and acknowledges that he uses the same imposing strategies that the Angel used in presenting the orthodox view. Blake could be suggesting, here, that the speaker uses the Angel's own monologic strategies to show the Angel the imposition that lies at the heart of his orthodox view. Also, as Nicholas Williams explains, the abrupt failed ending of this Memorable Fancy could indicate that the putting off of reconciliation between the two opposing views actually keeps them alive and vital and prevents an end to dialogue by reconciliation or by the dominance of one view over the other (218). Yet with the final Memorable Fancy noted above, Blake may be suggesting that a dialogic solution to the problem of imposition is illusory, tenuous at best, and perhaps even impossible. Either side of a debate can be just as likely to impose its version of the truth on the other and may only replace one monologue for another. Such a reconciliation of contraries, then, would seem to produce little progression and render a "marriage" of Heaven and Hell undesirable.

Even though the *Marriage* suggests that dialogue may not be immune to imposition, the peculiar form that it employs, the

Menippean satire, keeps it open to dialogue.² According to Bakhtin, the Menippean satire makes use of a variety of genres within itself in an exploration of ultimate questions. It internally juxtaposes the realistic and the fantastic, prose and poetry in order not to produce a “positive *embodiment* of truth” but to search “after truth, provoking it, and, most important, *testing* it” (*PDP* 114). Generically, the Menippean satire fosters a dialogue not just with other texts, as the *Marriage* does with Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, for instance, but also among its own parts. In the case of the *Marriage*, as Andrew Cooper has explained, the fragmentary nature of the genre produces a kind of debate that tests competing ideas and viewpoints within itself and disrupts the unifying voice of the author (“Irony” 41–42). The multiplicity of voices, as Johansen notes, also works to undermine eighteenth-century orthodoxy (49–50). To go one step further, the multiple perspectives of the Menippean satire works to prevent imposition by the author and acknowledges its own unfinalizability. While Blake raises the possibility that the demonic side of the debate within the *Marriage* might succumb to the very monologic discourse it intends to subvert, its generic arrangement prohibits imposition from occurring. Blake not only represents the dialogic searching for truth in the *Marriage*’s argument but also uses the dialogic nature of the *Marriage*’s genre to keep the argument from ending. In terms Blake would later use, the *Marriage* employs a genre that has already annihilated its Selfhood, its “ultimate authorial position,” to undermine the exclusive power of self-closed discourse.

THE DEBATE WITHIN THE *MARRIAGE*

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell opens with an “Argument,” but unlike a typical opening argument, like those that preface each book of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, this “Argument” does not summarize the story that follows. Rather, as Angela Esterhammer notes, it presents two opposing points of view and thereby “introduces us to the way in which the text will operate as a critique of authoritative language” (*Creating States* 160). “The Argument” describes how “the just man” walks the “perilous path” along the “vale of death,” converting death and barrenness into life and fertility (*MHH* 2.3–5, E 33). This situation continues until “the villain” imposes himself into the just man’s position and exiles the just man “into barren climes” (*MHH* 2.14, 16, E 33). Having usurped the place of the just man, the villain then “walks / In mild humility,” but this humility conceals and enforces his imposition, preventing the just man from regaining his former

place (*MHH* 2.17–18, E 33). Humility in Blake is often used both to conceal and maintain social control by manipulating responses to discourse, as we have seen in “The Human Abstract” in the previous chapter. Instead of allowing the imposition of the villain to silence the just man, however, Rintrah, who may be the just man as many assume or a separate observer responding to events he sees, roars, confronting the villain and countering his “mild humility.” Rintrah’s roar demands to be heard and answered, forcing dialogue and a debate between the two. Although the story narrated in “The Argument” is never developed in what follows in the *Marriage*, “The Argument” initiates an argument, a debate, through a clash of opposing perspectives, one of life and one of barrenness. It thus puts the focus of the remainder of the *Marriage* on the dynamics of debate, of dialogue between two opposing views. The next plate of the *Marriage* asserts the necessity of contrary viewpoints with a postulate that states the necessity of oppositions: “Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence” (*MHH* 3, E 34). This postulate suggests the need for differing viewpoints in dialogue. Without them, human existence ceases to exist. Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin writes, “A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (*PDP* 252). Rintrah roars to make his voice heard against the villain’s “mild” imposition because remaining silent would end his existence.

Following the postulate, Blake presents both sides of a debate on theology and biblical history, beginning with the side he calls “the religious”:

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.
Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from
Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (*MHH* 3, E 34)

According to this model, various contraries are aligned under the transcendent contraries of good and evil. Passivity, reason, and Heaven are grouped with the good, while activity, energy, and Hell are classified as evil. Since good is privileged over evil within this framework, each half of any set of contraries classified as good would also be privileged over its counterpart. Reason and passivity are thus privileged over energy and activity. This grouping of contraries under the headings “good” and “evil” effectively separates them and promotes those aligned with the good and excludes those aligned with evil. This exclusion,

however, violates the necessity of contraries for human existence as stated in the opening postulate. In this sense, the privileging of good over evil curtails dialogue because the “evil” side of any issue, argument, or debate is automatically discredited.

In the next plate, “The voice of the Devil” responds to the “religious” position and points out its exclusionary tactics:

All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following Errors.

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: A Body & a Soul.
 2. That Energy. calld Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. called Good. is alone from the Soul.
 3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.
- But the following Contraries to these are True

1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five Senses. the chief inlets of Soul in this age

2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

3 Energy is Eternal Delight. (*MHH* 4, E 34)

According to the Devil’s response, the “religious” view errs in its separation of the contraries—of body and soul and of reason and energy, in particular—and by the alignment of them under the transcendent contraries of good and evil, a strategy that stymies dialogue. This separation errs because it turns the contraries into “two real existing principles” or two separate abstract categories that arise “alone” or distinct from their respective sources. As separate abstract qualities, one abstraction can be privileged over the other; the contraries that are aligned with the good, soul and reason, are privileged over the body and energy, which are aligned with evil. This separation of contraries and the privileging of reason is enforced with the threat of eternal torment, allowing “the restrainer or reason” to usurp the place of energy, like the villain in the Argument (*MHH* 5, E 34). By considering a Bible or a code sacred, the “religious” view perpetuates a monologic interpretation that denies the possibility that another interpretation of the same Bible could exist. Instead of privileging one abstract quality over the other, however, the Devil unites the two contraries, positioning them as a working unit. The “Body is a portion of the Soul discerned by the five Senses,” and “Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.” Within Reason, “Energy is Eternal Delight.” The Devil’s response produces both a critique and an

alternative point of view, opening a dialogue with the religious view and undermining its monologic authority.

The Devil's dialogic encounter with the religious interpretation and his concern about the separation of contraries continue in the story of the Prolific and the Devourer. According to this story, "the Giants [the Prolific] who formed this world into its sensual existence . . . now seem to live in it in chains," but these chains are merely "the cunning of weak and tame minds. which have the power to resist energy" (*MHH* 16, E 40). The chains around the Prolific are exposed as nothing more than an interpretive construct. To produce this interpretation, the Devourer "takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole" (*MHH* 16, E 40), a "cunning" strategy of the "weak and tame minds" that imposes a portion of existence, such as one pair of transcendent contraries, over the whole. Yet according to the story, the Prolific and the Devourer, as contraries, always have and must continue to coexist in a kind of symbiotic relationship:

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights. . . .

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two. (*MHH* 16–17, E 40)

The Prolific is sustained in its creative endeavors by the Devourer, who consumes the excess of the Prolific production. The Devourer acts as Reason does to energy, giving it an outward bound, and without the Devourer to rein in its excesses, the Prolific would cease to exist.

Yet neither truly understands the other. Indeed, the Devourer believes the Prolific to be in chains, when they are apparently not, but as long as "these two classes of men" remain "enemies" their existence is ensured. As long as they retain their individual identities and their own individual viewpoints, they can exist in a dialogic relationship that ensures their existence and their functioning. Moreover, "Religion," which is "an endeavor to reconcile the two," would end their existence, as the religious argument suggests, by monologically aligning reason and energy, and by extension, the Devourer and the Prolific, with good and evil. The Prolific would be imposed upon to obey Reason and follow the Devourer, a situation that would cause the Prolific to restrain their energy and lose their creative identity. Religion would impose a single point of view, one that privileges reason, and subsumes other points of view through restraint.

Blake's critique of the privileging of reason has a decidedly anti-Enlightenment slant. As Daniel Stempel has noted, the tradition of European rationalism had its beginnings with Descartes, in whose work reason becomes the voice of revelation. For Descartes, the language of reason is the only language that the mental and material worlds have in common, and as reason scrutinizes raw, unanalyzed human perception and mental constructs, it reveals what is real and what is illusion (74–75). By privileging the language of reason as the only mediator between the mental and material worlds, Descartes and those who follow him reject any other signifying discourse. As Bakhtin writes, "European rationalism, with its cult of a unified and exclusive reason" fostered "the consolidation of monologism and its permeation into all spheres and ideological life." Under these conditions, "semantic unity of any sort is everywhere represented by a single consciousness and a single point of view," supported by the assumption of an objective external world and the ability of reason to reveal it (*PDP* 82).

The privileging of the language of reason for its ability to reveal an objective outside world can be seen in the work of Blake's favorite Enlightenment foil: John Locke. In Locke's description of how sense impressions become abstract ideas, signifiers are assigned to sense impressions through reason: "The Senses at first let in particular *ideas*, and furnish the yet empty Cabinet: And the Mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the Memory, and Names got to them. Afterwards, the Mind proceeding farther, abstracts them, and by Degrees learns the use of general Names. In this manner the Mind comes to be furnish'd with *Ideas* and Language, the Materials about which to exercise its discursive Faculty: And the use of Reason becomes daily more visible, as these Materials, that give it Employment, increase" (55; bk. 1, ch. 2, sec. 15). According to Locke's formulation, sense impressions, or "particular ideas," enter the "empty cabinet" of the mind, and names are applied to them. Reason, given employment by sense impressions, "abstracts" them and applies general names. In this schema, words and language are reduced to labeling sense impressions received from an objective outside world that can be understood through reason. It is this reduction that Blake deplores. As Robert N. Essick writes, "Blake is clearly critical of the sensiblist position that limits words to object-reference. The fault lies in an erroneous metaphysics to which Locke has, in Blake's view, bound his semiotics. Locke then brands as fallacious any linguistic extensions outside the referential system" (*William Blake* 46). Language, for Locke, functions only as a system of object-reference

in which reason applies names to sense impressions for the purpose of revealing the objective world. Yet signs do not refer to objects themselves, as Locke himself writes, but to sense impressions, which can only subjectively interpret the outside world. The assumption of an *objective* outside world causes Locke to impose reason on individual interpretations, thereby enforcing the objective world assumption. Furthermore, since reason governs the application of signs to sense impressions, the sign is limited in how it functions. For Locke, signs are arbitrary—that is, they have no intrinsic connection to the things they name—but they are applied strictly by reason to particular sense impressions, limiting their use and reducing a listener's ability to interpret them creatively. While the arbitrary nature of the sign can enhance creativity in discourse—because the arbitrary sign has no intrinsic connection to the external world and is open to interpretation—the arbitrary sign in the Lockean sense severely limits this openness because of the exclusive hold that reason has on it.

Instead, as Essick notes, Blake feels that the word is capable of calling into existence new thoughts, images, and worlds: "God's Word was not limited to the representation of that which already existed. Why should man's?" (*William Blake* 46). Blake disagrees not with the arbitrary nature of the sign, since its very arbitrariness opens the sign to creative understanding, but with Locke's assumption of an objective world and the imposition of reason to validate that assumption. In Locke's view, reason stands above language and the senses, which become only *materials* for the exercise of reason, so that any creative or imaginative faculty is completely excluded from the cognitive process. Only language that is governed by reason has the ability to reveal the objective world and is kept separate from the sensory and linguistic materials it manipulates, excluding the creative powers of energy and the imagination from the signifying process.

This exaltation of reason and the demonization of energy found its way into the political discourse in Blake's own time. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke argues that individuals want their "passions" restrained by government as a safeguard against an excess of energy:

Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should frequently be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done *by a power out of themselves*; and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle

and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. (151)

Not only does society want the will of individuals controlled and their passions thwarted, but according to Burke, such restraint is their right. Nor does Burke believe that individuals have any claim to passion or energy: "Men have no right to what is not reasonable, and to what is not for their benefit" (154). Burke's privileging of reason over energy also informs his comments about the Republican side of the French Revolution and their British sympathizers:

A cheap, bloodless reformation, a guiltless liberty, appear flat and vapid to their taste. There must be a great change of scene; there must be a magnificent stage effect; there must be a grand spectacle to rouse the imagination, grown torpid with the lazy enjoyment of sixty years security, and the still unanimating repose of public prosperity. The Preacher [Richard Price, a radical sympathizer] found them all in the French revolution. This inspires a juvenile warmth through his whole frame. His enthusiasm kindles as he advances; and when he arrives at his peroration, it is in a full blaze. (156–57)

According to Burke, the Republicans have grown "lazy" and no longer have any "taste" for a "bloodless reformation," suggesting that they choose energy over reason not as a political necessity but as a matter of fashion. Burke's comments on Price, with their images of heat and fire, link energy and imagination with the fires of Hell and with evil, thus demonizing energy and imagination and excluding them from proper human conduct. Burke sees energy and imagination as the result of laziness and sloth and claims that individuals not only have no right to them but also want the government to subdue them.

Against the conservatives' demonization of energy, the more radical writers exposed and overturned the labels that the conservatives applied to them. In *The Rights of Man*, which responds directly to Burke's *Reflections*, Thomas Paine rejects Burke's characterization of the revolutionaries by explaining the necessity of energy and reversing the demonized status Burke gives it. Against Burke's charge that members of Parliament "have seen the French rebel against a mild and lawful monarch, with more fury, outrage, and insult, than ever any people has been known to rise against the most illegal usurper, or the most sanguinary tyrant" (126), Paine first explains that energy is necessary to any endeavor: "When it becomes necessary to do a thing, the whole heart and soul should go into the measure, or not attempt

it. That crisis was then arrived, and there remained no choice but to act with determined vigour, or not act at all" (208–9). According to Paine, energy and enthusiasm are as necessary to the Revolution as they are to anything else and that action was taken only when it was necessary. That Louis XVI was "a mild and lawful monarch" only lent more support for the revolutionaries' actions:

The king was known to be the friend of the nation, and this circumstance was favourable to the enterprise. Perhaps no man bred up in the style of an absolute King, ever possessed a heart so little disposed to the exercise of that species of power as the present King of France. But the principles of the government itself still remained the same. The Monarch and the Monarchy were distinct and separate things; and it was against the established despotism of the latter, and not against the person or principles of the former, that the revolt commenced, and the revolution has been carried. . . . What Mr Burke considers as a reproach to the French Revolution, (that of bringing it forward under a reign more mild than the preceding ones), is one of its highest honours. The revolutions that have taken place in other European countries, have been excited by personal hatred. The rage was against the man, and he became the victim. But, in the instance of France, we see a revolution generated in the rational contemplation of the rights of man, and distinguishing from the beginning between persons and principles. (209–10)

Instead of personal hatred, the revolutionaries are motivated by "the rational contemplation of the rights of man," giving their energy and enthusiasm a basis in reason. Here, Paine sounds much like Blake who writes that while "Energy is the only life," "Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" (*MHH* 4, E 34). By claiming that the revolutionaries took action not against the king but against the despotic principles of the monarchy, Paine reverses Burke's contempt for the revolutionaries into honor. The basis of this reversal can be seen in Paine's comment on Burke's strategy for characterizing the revolutionaries:

How then is it that such vast classes of mankind as are distinguished by the appellation of the vulgar, or the ignorant mob, are so numerous in all old countries? . . . It is by distortedly exalting some men, that others are distortedly debased, till the whole is out of nature. A vast mass of mankind are degradedly thrown into the background of the human picture, to bring forward with greater glare, the puppet-show of State and aristocracy. In the commencement of a revolution, those men are rather the followers of the *camp* than of the *standard* of liberty, and have yet to be instructed how to reverence it. (214)

According to Paine, Burke's "distortions" privilege and foreground the state and reason while demonizing the energy of the whole mass of humankind. Paine deconstructs these "distortions" to overturn Burke's hierarchies. While Blake's *Marriage* may be a unique event in literature, it is a participant in the political debate, or dialogue, of its day and engages the very the language of that debate.³

When Blake introduces the privileging of reason in biblical history, he gives the debate in the *Marriage* a political and historical dimension. At the same time, he follows a strategy similar to Paine's by redefining Burke's and the conservatives' demonizing terms:

The history of this [Reason's imposition on Desire] is written in Paradise Lost. & the governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.

And the original Archangel or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan and his children are call'd Sin & Death

But in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan. (*MHH* 5, E 34)

According to the Devil's account, this history is recorded in Milton's *Paradise Lost* where "the governor or Reason is call'd Messiah." The "religious" apply reason for linguistic and social restraint and enforcement, yet the Devil overturns this alignment when he points out that "Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan" in the Book of Job. By overturning the hegemonic alignment of reason and power, the Devil's account introduces a new interpretation of the same history. Although "this history has been adopted by both parties," each party interprets the history differently: "It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out. but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss" (*MHH* 5–6, E 34–35). Reason has one interpretation, that "Desire was cast out," while the Devil presents another in claiming that not Satan or "Desire" but the *Messiah* fell and "formed a heaven" from "the Abyss." These two interpretations come from the same history, yet they are unreconcilable. The introduction of a new interpretation of history produces a dialogue that undermines the monologic power of "the religious" view.

The Devil's interpretation of biblical history, which remakes the casting out of Desire into the fall of the Messiah who builds a new heaven, relies on the substitution of names. In "the religious" account, reason is aligned with Messiah and Satan with desire, but the Devil's account reverses this alignment. Such a reversal requires an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified in which the

two are aligned by the imagination. If the sign were motivated, either through imitation or expression, the signifier and signified would be linked by a one-to-one correspondence, since a motivated sign has a direct and inherent connection with what it signifies. The one-to-one correspondence of a motivated sign would restrict an individual's ability to interpret and create. Even an arbitrary sign in the Lockean sense of originating in the senses with associations made by reason inhibits an individual's capacity to create and interpret linguistically. Lockean arbitrary signs, as we have noted, assume an objective outside world that can be signified directly, rather than subjectively interpreted. The assumption of an objective outside world and the employment of reason to govern signification excludes the imagination from the interpretive and signifying processes, severely limiting an individual's linguistic creativity. In a motivated sign system or an arbitrary sign system governed by reason, individuals would not have the freedom to invent new meanings for old signifiers or to create new linguistic constructions to reflect their own unique perspectives. Language would become a self-closed system imposed on individuals. Blake's understanding of the arbitrary sign founded on imagination allows for dialogue to take place on the level of the sign itself. The Devil's alternative interpretation of biblical history requires a new and imaginative realignment of names, calling into question the established interpretation both of biblical history and of the signifiers that describe it.

This linguistic argument against the assignation of signs to sense impressions continues in plate 11 and exposes the coercion inherent in self-closed discourse as it describes the transition from poetry to priesthood:

The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could percieve.

And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country. placing it under its mental deity.

Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental dieties from their objects: thus began Priesthood.

Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.

And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things.

Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast. (*MHH* 11, E 38)

The origin of “Gods or Geniuses,” according to this view, lies in the “animation” that ancient poets provided to sensible objects, calling the “Gods or Geniuses” by “the names” of the sensible objects. Similar to Locke’s description, which assigns names to sense impressions, the ancient poets begin with sensible objects and follow with the application of names. Yet, rather than passively receiving sense impressions of objects and using names to refer to the impressions, the ancient poets apply the names to the “Gods or Geniuses” with which they “animate” the sensible objects. Instead of mere object references, signs have the power to create deities that give life to material objects. This creative power exposes the essential problem inherent in Locke’s sign system in which reason enforces the assumption of an objective outside world by limiting individual interpretation. Discourse becomes self-closed by “realizing” or “abstracting” “the mental deities from their objects,” thus enabling the formation of an enclosed system—“forms of worship from poetic tales”—that affirms itself as truth. As Essick writes, such a system is a “figuration in which reality is treated as though it were merely a system of signs . . . pointing toward what the system posits as real—but which Blake believes is actually the reification of a lie” (*William Blake* 98). Such a system is locked in a hermeneutic circle in which signs reinforce the “truth” of the system that assumes an objective outside world. When these mental deities are “abstracted” into general concepts and affirmed as “forms of worship,” they deny others the opportunity to exercise their own imagination on reality, to create their own “Mental Things” that “are alone Real,” and they are thus enslaved by the system (*VLJ*, E 565). The ancient poets replace reason’s hegemony with creative understanding. Although the deities that the ancient poets create are admittedly “mental,” and hence subjective and arbitrary, the ancient poets actively and imaginatively create a connection between the signifier and signified. Instead of a name applied to a sense impression by reason and affirmed as truth, signifiers are linked to the things they name through the imagination, giving individuals the opportunity to create their own versions of reality and representing them dialogically.⁴

The debate on the interpretation of biblical history continues in the fourth “Memorable Fancy,” when in this narrative, the speaker explains that an Angel appears before him and proceeds to predict the speaker’s fate: “O pitiable foolish young man! O horrible! O dreadful state! consider the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself to all eternity, to which thou art going in such career” (*MHH* 17, E 41). According to the Angel, the speaker’s fate is, without question, sealed, since the speaker’s “career” determines that he will spend all eternity

in Hell. From the Angel's point of view, the "foolish" speaker's "state" is "horrible" and "dreadful," and he sees no other alternative for the speaker except "the hot burning dungeon." Yet, the Angel's viewpoint and his understanding of the speaker's fate result directly from the Angel's "religious" interpretation of biblical history. When the Angel takes the speaker to see his fate, the two pass "thro' a stable & thro' a church & down into the church vault at the end of which was a mill: thro' the mill we went and came to a cave. down the winding cavern we groped our tedious way till a void boundless as a nether sky appeared beneath us" (*MHH* 17, E 41). According to Stempel, each of the places along this path refers to a particular moment in the history of Christianity. The stable, the church, the church vault, the mill at the end of the vault, the cavern, and the infinite abyss correspond respectively to the Nativity, the founding of the church, the death of faith in organized religion, the mill of logic, the cavern of the five senses, and the Newtonian universe of natural philosophy (72). The path they take represents a sequence of events in the history of the Christian church in Britain, leading up to and including the present state of the church in which reason is privileged over energy. The Angel's path takes them to their destination as his argument concerning the speaker's fate leads to his conclusion.

Once at the abyss, the Angel and the speaker see a vision of fire, blood, and darkness that ends with the head of Leviathan: "His forehead was divided into streaks of green & purple like those on a tygers forehead: soon we saw his mouth & red gills hang just above the raging foam tinging the black deep with beams of blood, advancing toward us with all the fury of a spiritual existence" (*MHH* 18–19, E 41). As the Angel indicates, this vision ending with Leviathan, "king over all the children of pride" (Job 41.34), will be the result of the speaker's "career," an outcome that, according to the Angel, is certain. The vision of Leviathan is only a projection into the future of a specific interpretation of the past, yet the Angel presents his view of the speaker's future as the only possible future. The conclusion of the Angel's argument can only be an extrapolation of his own specific viewpoint and not absolute truth, as he claims. As the Angel and the speaker make their way to the end of the cavern and the abyss, they reach the present. What forms on the abyss is a representation of the future; however, the future has yet to take place. Following the dictum that "God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies" (*MHH* 4, E 34), the Angel presents the speaker's fate as certain, as finalized, imposing on the speaker a monologic, self-closed version of the future that enforces the Angel's point of view. Not only does the Angel assert a finalized version of history, but he uses it to finalize the future.

From the very beginning of the fourth “Memorable Fancy,” however, the speaker challenges the Angel’s interpretation in a way similar to Paine’s challenge to Burke. What allows Paine to reframe the underlying ideas behind the French Revolution in terms that are in such stark opposition to Burke, according to David Fairer, is that whereas Burke’s argument in the *Reflections* depends on an organic view of a continuous history in which each generation depends on the last, Paine sees each new generation as self-determining, free to make its own decisions, and the ties to previous generations as oppressive impositions of the old on the new (“Organizing Verse” 12–13). The speaker of this Memorable Fancy takes a similar approach. When the Angel first appears and claims to know that the speaker will spend eternity in Hell, the speaker, rather than immediately accepting the Angel’s pronouncements, wants to discuss the matter with the Angel: “I said. perhaps you will be willing to shew me my eternal lot & we will contemplate together upon it and see whether your lot or mine is most desirable” (*MHH* 17, E 41). While the Angel claims to know already what the speaker’s fate will be, the speaker suggests that once the Angel presents his view, the issue is up for debate: “We will contemplate together upon it.” The speaker turns the Angel’s monologic assertion into an unfinalizable utterance in dialogue. By questioning what the Angel believes to be “truth,” the speaker undermines the Angel’s assertions and exposes them as only one possible interpretation of the speaker’s fate.

This conflict of interpretations is further developed at the abyss. Although the two travel the same path and follow the same history to arrive at the speaker’s fate, the speaker sees a different version of his fate in the abyss. When the Angel leaves, the vision of Leviathan—which the speaker calls “this appearance”—vanishes, and he finds himself “sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moon light” (*MHH* 19, E 42). Instead of the vision of Hell that the Angel portends, the speaker sees instead a pleasant end to his “career.” From the speaker’s point of view, “the fires of hell,” which “look like torment and insanity” to the Angel, appear as “the enjoyments of Genius” (*MHH* 6, E 35). Furthermore, the speaker’s own alternative vision argues against monologically affirmed interpretations. As the speaker sits upon the moonlit bank, he hears “a harper who sung to the harp. & his theme was, The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind” (*MHH* 19, E 42). That this theme is sung by a harper to the speaker adds another voice in the dialogic construction of truth and further undermines the authority of the Angel’s monologically affirmed truth. The harper, an externalized figure of the speaker’s

imagination, sings to him. The Angel's ideologically derived version of the speaker's fate is a vision of fear designed to enforce the Angel's ideology, producing in Leviathan "a reptile of the mind" against which the harper sings, but the speaker's vision both derives from the dialogic confrontation with the Angel and represents within itself a dialogic moment that warns the speaker against monologism. Not only does the speaker present an alternative view of biblical history and its relation to his own existence, but this view is also represented not as a vision of fear and enforcement but as a dialogic moment that informs the speaker's own understanding of the Angel's argument. While the Angel believes the vision of Leviathan and the speaker's fate to be unalterable truth (the Angel is surprised when the speaker returns and asks "how [the speaker] escaped" [*MHH* 19, E 42]), the speaker considers them to be mere "appearance" that have no substantial or intrinsic existence. He claims that the appearance of Leviathan "was owing to [the Angel's] metaphysics" and the work of "Analytics," a conclusion imposed on the future by an ideologically biased interpretation of history (*MHH* 19, 20, E 42).

An apparent resolution to the debate in the *Marriage* takes place in the fifth and final "Memorable Fancy." The speaker of this "Memorable Fancy" witnesses an exchange between a Devil and an Angel on the "proper" interpretation of the Ten Commandments' role in worship. The Devil begins with an extremely unorthodox view of worshipping divinity through the worship of humankind: "The worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius. and loving the greatest men best, those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God" (*MHH* 22–23, E 43). The Devil's view, which denies the existence of God as a separate supreme being, calls for honoring and valuing each individual "according to his genius." The Devil supports the integrity of the concrete individual and recognizes and celebrates the differences of each one. On the level of language and the individual, such a view would value each person's utterances as defining his or her individuality and would value each person's individual contribution to the dialogic community.

According to the Angel, however, biblical law, especially the Ten Commandments, should be privileged above human discourse: "Thou Idolater, is not God One? & is not he visible in Jesus Christ? and has not Jesus Christ given his sanction to the law of ten commandments and are not all other men fools, sinners, & nothings?" (*MHH* 23, E 43). In the Angel's interpretation, God is "One," above and apart from the many human individuals, and His discourse, the Ten Commandments, governs all humankind, who are "fools, sinners, & nothings."

The “law of the ten commandments” monologically imposes on and reduces individual voices to nothing. Instead of recognizing human beings as individuals, this characterization divides God and human beings into two abstract categories, privileging God and His discourse and ignoring the individuality of human beings, which their discourse marks and defines. Their discourse, their interpretations and utterances, are subordinate to the monologic laws imposed upon them from above and against which they may not respond.

The Devil recognizes that the Angel’s view derives from the “religious” tendency to divide and privilege abstract qualities. He responds by using the Angel’s own argument to reaffirm the individuality of each person and to reestablish the center of divinity in humankind. The Angel claims that “all *other* men” are “fools, sinners, & nothings” as opposed to Jesus Christ, in whom God is visible. The Devil replies, “Bray a fool in a mortar with wheat. yet shall not his folly be beaten out of him: if Jesus Christ is the greatest man, you ought to love him in the greatest degree” (*MHH* 23, E 43). The Devil concedes that some people are undeniably fools; one can “bray a fool,” yet the fool will retain his folly. Other people, however, are not fools. Jesus Christ, according to the Devil, is no fool, is the greatest man, and should be loved in the greatest degree, while others, as the Devil suggests, should be loved in a degree that befits them. By emphasizing the humanity of Jesus and differentiating Him from other people—some of whom are fools—the Devil maintains the divinity and diversity of individuals. According to the Devil, not all individuals are fools, and divinity is as much a human characteristic as folly. Each person has his or her own “genius,” or individuality, that averts abstract categories.

Once the Devil establishes the divinity and individuality of human beings, he then reestablishes the importance of the discrete individual’s utterances by asserting that Jesus Christ “sanctioned” the Ten Commandments by breaking them. Since the Ten Commandments are upheld as a privileged discourse imposed on all individuals, breaking them functions as a kind of satire, undermining their authority and their privileged status. They are thus shown to be not a discourse privileged above all other discourses but instead one discourse among many and subject to the same conditions inherent in the process of creative understanding that all discourses undergo in individual interpretation. The Devil concludes by saying, “I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules” (*MHH* 23–24, E 43). In acting from “impulse,” Jesus acts according to his individual genius,

and in breaking the Ten Commandments, he ignores the coercive and fallacious power of monologic discourse.

With this conclusion to the Devil's argument, the Angel embraces the Devil's "flame of fire and was consumed and arose as Elijah," a gesture that anticipates what Blake will later call "self-annihilation" (*MHH* 24, E 43). The annihilation of Selfhood requires that the individual deny the priority, the absolute "truth," of his or her own discourse and accept the discourse of others, however contrary, as representations of "truth" as valid as one's own. To one in a state of Selfhood, in which an individual monologically affirms his or her own discourse as "truth" and views the discourse of others as error, self-annihilation implies the dissolution of identity and seems worse than death; however, it is essential for the vitality of individual voices and the existence of dialogue. Indeed, the Angel, having embraced the Devil's arguments, seems to take on a new identity, since he "is now become a Devil," a voice of prophecy, and he and the speaker of this "Memorable Fancy" "often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense," sharing interpretations that are contrary to orthodoxy (*MHH* 24, E 44). Although the possibility exists that the Angel may have simply exchanged one orthodoxy for another, the Angel's embracement of the Devil seems to be an embracement of dialogue.

The *Marriage* concludes with "A Song of Liberty," which prophetically calls for dialogue and denounces the imposition of monologism as it rewrites the casting out of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. The opening of the "Song" decries the lack of dialogue and urges its commencement:

1. The Eternal Female groand! it was heard over all the Earth:
2. Albions coast is sick silent; the American meadows faint!
- 3 Shadows of Prophecy shiver along by the lakes and rivers and mutter across the ocean! France rend down thy dungeon;
4. Golden Spain burst the barriers of old Rome;
5. Cast thy keys O Rome into the deep down falling, even to eternity down falling,
6. And weep! (*MHH* 25, E 44)

In these lines, the loud groan of the Eternal Female, which "was heard over all the Earth," is directly contrasted with the weak, muted voices of the rest of the world. Albion's coast is not only silent, but this silence is also a sick one. The fainting of the American meadows also indicates an infirm silence, while prophecy is only mere "shadows" that "shiver" and "mutter." Dialogue has been stifled, and France, Spain, and Rome are called upon to remove the obstructions to

dialogue by rending dungeons, bursting barriers, and casting down keys to unlock the prisons of Selfhood and self-closed discourse. They are also called upon to “weep,” to produce the kind of anguished but healing utterance that breaks through and overwhelms the oppressive, debilitating silence.

The “new born terror howling” that the Eternal Female takes to “the starry king,” a figure of authority, represents a new, “howling” voice opposed to the king’s monologic power that maintains the silence, so the king’s “hand of jealousy . . . hurl’d the new born wonder thro’ the starry night” (*MHH* 25–26, E 44). After casting out the “son of fire,” the king “promulgates his ten commands,” which are “clouds written with curses,” and a discourse privileged above all others, in an attempt to silence the son (*MHH* 26–27, E 44–45). Instead, the son “stamps the stony law to dust,” breaking the grip of monologic power (*MHH* 27, E 45). The chorus of the “Song” calls for the end of monologic laws of oppression, urging “the Priests” not to “curse the sons of joy” “with hoarse note,” the tyrant not to “lay the bound or build the roof,” and “pale religious letchery” not to “call that virginity, that wishes but acts not!” (*MHH* 27, E 45). The chorus argues against the laws, the privileged discourses that impose upon individual interpretation, because these discourses, like all discourses, do not proclaim the only “truth” but are, instead, themselves limited by the necessarily narrow perspective of those who utter them. To recognize the equal rights of all speakers in dialogue is to accept their differences as speakers and as interpreters, to recognize “every thing that lives” as “Holy” (*MHH* 27, E 45).

THE INTRACTABILITY OF IMPOSITION

While the Painite view of history operates from the point of view that each new generation is self-determining and free of the oppressive impositions of the previous (Fairer, “Organizing Verse” 12–13), Makdisi notes that Blake is especially aware that such a position could potentially replace the monarchical tyranny with its own kind of tyranny and oppression (29). This awareness occurs throughout the *Marriage*. After stamping “the stony law to dust,” the son of fire cries, “Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease,” celebrating the end of the king’s law and the monologic power he derives from it (*MHH* 27, E 45). This line, however, raises the issue that either side of any debate—including the side that has been suppressed—is prone to self-closed imposition and to deny the other side a voice. Regarding the lion and the wolf, S. Foster Damon writes, “The Wolf is a predatory animal whose

victims are the flocks which the noble Lion protects. Blake often refers to the warfare between the two" (*A Blake Dictionary* 449). In Damon's description, the lion and the wolf seem analogous to the Prolific and the Devourer, with the wolf performing the function of receiving "the excesses" of the lion's "delights" (*MHH* 16, E 40). As with any set of contraries, the two are necessary for existence, and "whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence," since reconciliation artificially erases their differences and their individual identities (*MHH* 16–17, E 40). In calling for the cessation of the lion and wolf, then, the howling son of fire may be inadvertently inaugurating a destructive reconciliation between himself and the starry king. The "Proverbs of Hell" also suggest that the lion and wolf must continue unreconciled: "The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword. are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man" (*MHH* 8.27, E 36). Although here the lion and the wolf are not pitted against each other directly as contraries, the proverb suggests that their voices—their roaring and howling—are aspects of eternity beyond the comprehension of any human and should not be controlled. If the analogy is accurate, then the son of fire could be seen as attempting to silence the patriarchal king, ending their contrary existences. The son of fire, therefore, could be prone to commit the same monologic coercion that the king has exerted when he was in power. Although the "Song of Liberty" urges dialogue, it also raises the possibility that the imposition of one voice over another can always occur. As one center of monologic power is undone, another seems ready to take its place.

Other concerns about dialogue's ability to overcome imposition are also raised in the *Marriage*. Throughout the debate on biblical history, "the religious" argument has been characterized as monologically coercive and requiring verbal conformity, but indications that the diabolical argument can be just as coercive in persuading the Angel appear as well. After the speaker of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" returns from seeing his fate, he proposes showing the Angel his own fate: "But now we have seen my eternal lot, shall I shew you yours? he laughed at my proposal: but I by force suddenly caught him in my arms, & flew westerly thro' the night" (*MHH* 19, E 42). When the Angel laughs at the speaker's proposal, the speaker forces the Angel to follow him, thus stifling the Angel's incredulous response. By not allowing the Angel to respond freely, the speaker of this "Memorable Fancy" exhibits the same coercion of which the Angel is accused.

On their way to see the Angel's fate, the speaker stops to collect "Swedenborgs volumes," and they eventually see "the stable and the

church, & I took him to the altar and open'd the Bible, and lo! it was a deep pit, into which I descended driving the Angel before me" (*MHH* 19, E 42). This venture contains part of the same sequence of biblical history that the Angel followed in bringing the speaker to a vision of his fate, beginning with the Nativity and the founding of the church, but instead of finding a vault, a mill, a cavern, and an abyss, they find a Bible that opens into a deep pit, possibly indicating the "errors" that the voice of the Devil finds in "all Bibles or sacred codes" (*MHH* 4, E 34). Once in the pit, they find a "number of monkeys, baboons, & all of that species" that grow numerous and devour each other. When they return with a skeleton of one of the monkeys, the skeleton becomes "Aristotles Analytics," a text that may have informed the Angel's interpretation of biblical history, since the speaker claims that the Angel's works are also "Analytics" (*MHH* 19–20, E 42).⁵ The speaker, however, takes "Swedenborgs volumes" on the way to see the Angel's fate, suggesting that the vision of the monkeys is the result of Swedenborg's influence on the speaker's argument. What is important is that the interpretation of biblical history has changed with the change in interpreters and that each interpretation is guided or colored by a univocally ideological foundation. Furthermore, the speaker admits his own coercive tactics. When the Angel complains, "Thy phantasy has imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed," the speaker answers, "we impose on one another" (*MHH* 20, E 42). Each side in this debate, therefore, is as imposing as the other. The debate presents two interpretations of the same history as two competing ideologies that coerce listeners into accepting them. Although the "religious" side of the debate is accused of monologic control of others throughout the *Marriage*, those arguing against the "religious" are equally capable of imposition.

Even though the speaker of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" uses Swedenborg as a guide for interpreting biblical history, the *Marriage* confronts the reader with an oddly ambivalent view of Swedenborg. The opening of the *Marriage* seems to celebrate Swedenborg: "As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise" (*MHH* 3, E 34). The opening signals a revival of contraries, as "a new heaven" begins and "the Eternal Hell revives," marking the return of Adam to Paradise. At the center of this revival of contraries is Swedenborg, "the Angel of the Resurrection," whose writings are "guidebooks for travelling in eternity" (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* 393). Yet, the

application of the term “Angel” to Swedenborg aligns him with “the religious,” the group accused by the voice of the Devil as following an erroneous, and monologic, view of biblical history. As such, his “sitting at the tomb” could suggest an association with the villain of “The Argument,” who imposes death and barrenness on the just man’s fertile existence and that he is in a self-closed state and dead to dialogic existence. Furthermore, his writings are “folded up,” possibly suggesting that they have been rejected, like clothes folded and put away or cast off. In his commentary on the *Marriage*, Harold Bloom notes that Swedenborg had prophesied that the Last Judgment would begin in 1757, which happened to be the year of Blake’s birth: “So it came about that Blake, at the Christological age of thirty-three, revived the Eternal Hell of imaginative desire within himself and rose from nature’s tomb, leaving Swedenborg sitting there” (E 897). As Bloom suggests, Blake’s ambivalence might indicate that although Swedenborg’s influence is essential to Blake’s understanding of biblical history, Swedenborg can also be seen as the figure whose self-closed writings necessitated the revival of “the Eternal Hell” to counter the thirty-three year advent of Swedenborg’s “new heaven.” In this view, Swedenborg functions similarly to the villain in “The Argument” who imposes on the just man, prompting Rintrah to “roar” against him. It is not clear at this point in the *Marriage*, though, just which role Swedenborg and his writings play in the interpretation of biblical history. Indeed, as Larrissy notes, that Swedenborg has such a prominent place at the start of the *Marriage* could also point to the derivative nature of Blake’s work (*William Blake* 104).

In the section that immediately follows the fourth “Memorable Fancy,” however, Swedenborg is directly aligned with the self-closed ideology of the Angel:

I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning:

Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new; tho’ it is only the Contents or Index of already publish’d books. (*MHH* 21, E 42)

According to this passage, Angels, in “speaking of themselves as the only wise,” affirm their own discourse as truth and deny others a voice in dialogue, since the Angels would label any differing opinion as erroneous. Their “confident insolence” comes from “systematic reasoning,” the monologic theoretizing that abstracts contraries and privileges one over the other. As Joseph Viscomi explains, Swedenborg

understood the Bible as having a coherence based on a system of correspondences or analogies and that he claimed Angels understood the same system ("The Lessons" 184). Since Swedenborg writes nothing new, moreover, he does not add his own voice to the dialogue but only repeats what has already been said, thereby perpetuating self-closed discourse. The speaker concedes that Swedenborg "shews the folly of churches & exposes hypocrites," but he also "imagines that all are religious. & himself the single one on earth that ever broke a net" (*MHH* 21–22, E 43). By claiming for himself a singular position in exposing folly, he perpetuates that folly because he privileges his discourse as the only truth. Instead of opening dialogue, Swedenborg stifles it. Indeed, his own writings are the products of exclusionary monologization: "He conversed with Angels who are all religious, & conversed not with Devils who all hate religion, for he was incapable thro' his conceited notions" (*MHH* 22, E 43). By excluding the Devils from his "conversations," he excludes their viewpoint from his own writings, which only present the Angels' perspective. Because of such exclusionary tactics, Swedenborg "has not written one new truth" but has instead "written all the old falshoods" (*MHH* 22, E 43). This view of Swedenborg supports the admission of the speaker of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" that the vision of the Angel's fate was "imposed" upon him through an ideological reading of biblical history, through the monologic influence of Swedenborg, and not through the dialogic means of creative interpretation. While the vision of the speaker's fate "was owing to [the Angel's] metaphysics" and "Aristotles Analytics," the speaker had used "Swedenborgs volumes" in producing the Angel's fate and admitted that "we impose on one another" (*MHH* 19–20, E 42). This admission demonstrates that even though the Angels are portrayed as perpetrators of self-closed discourse, those who argue against them are equally capable of the monologization of discourse. Any speaker is susceptible to imposing on a listener by affirming his or her discourse as truth and denying the listener a voice in the construction of meaning.

Thus the *Marriage* raises the distinct possibility that the "voice of the Devil" is just as likely to become as ideologically rigid, as self-closed, as that of the Angel. This possibility calls into question the nature of the Angel's conversion in the fifth "Memorable Fancy." If the Devil's arguments were imposed upon the Angel, then the Angel's embrace of the Devil may suggest that the Angel has merely dropped one ideology for another and has still not developed his own voice or a dialogic creative understanding. The Angel and the speaker of the fifth "Memorable Fancy" "read the Bible together in its infernal or

diabolical sense" and not necessarily in their own individual ways. The *Marriage* suggests the possibility that neither the Angel nor the Devil has an individual voice in dialogue and that neither responds to the other through creative understanding but that they are both enslaved by self-closed systems. In raising this possibility, the *Marriage* must then answer the question of how discourse can avoid self-closure. The problem that the *Marriage* makes central is the role of "imposition" in discourse and how it can and must be avoided.

Imposition in discourse, then, limits dialogue by suppressing the listener's ability to respond actively, reducing any response to passive repetition. According to Bakhtin, such passivity remains "purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given" ("Discourse in the Novel" 281). Imposition operates through rhetorical coercion by founding and enforcing the "truth" of a discourse through an authority figure, such as a God who "will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies" (*MHH* 4, E 34), or a Locke, a Burke, or even a Swedenborg who has "the vanity to speak of [himself] as the only wise" "with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning" (*MHH* 21, E 42). Again, such authority affirms that what it says is true and repudiates others' opinions as erroneous. Figures like the villain in "The Argument" also impose upon others through what Blake calls "humility," the duplicitous manipulations of discourse that entrap addressees into accepting the speaker's discourse as "truth." Imposition, through coercion and humility, stifles dialogue by denying listeners an opportunity to respond freely, and all speakers, even those struggling against monologic authority, are prone to such imposition. The problem that the *Marriage* poses, then, is whether discourse can ever be free from imposition.

If discourse is to have any chance to undo self-closure, it must first recognize its dialogic nature—its responsiveness to previous utterances, its addressivity, and its anticipation of future responses. As Bakhtin writes, "However monological the utterance may be, . . . it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. . . . The utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account" ("PSG" 92). Although monologic discourse attempts to deny dialogue by claiming singular authority for the "truth" it utters and by stifling response, it cannot help but be a response to previous utterances, be directed toward an addressee, and be a catalyst for future response. The recognition of discourse's

dialogicality, however, foregrounds its responsiveness. One method that Blake often uses to represent rhetorically the dialogicality of discourse is to have the speaker of a poem address other figures—a muse figure or a figure of the reader—to incorporate other voices involved in both the composition and reception of the poem directly into the text, making it not the product of a single author but a collaboration of a multitude of voices. In the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, as we have seen, the piper addresses a child on a cloud and the Bard addresses the Earth to represent the dialogic function of the poet's inspiration and the inclusion of the reader in the inspired dialogue. The *Marriage* makes a similar rhetorical move in the banquet scene with Isaiah and Ezekiel, when a speaker challenges the two prophets about the nature of their writings. This challenge represents a recognition of discourse's dialogicality.

Indeed, this "Memorable Fancy" questions the very dialogic nature of poetic production and reception. As the speaker explains, the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel had dined with him, and he had asked them "how they dared so roundly to assert. that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition" (*MHH* 12, E 38). Since Isaiah and Ezekiel claim, as the speaker suggests, that God "spoke" to them and informed their discourse, they may be recognizing the dialogic nature of their inspiration; however, since "the religious" claim God's sanction for their monologic authority, the prophets' discourse could also be perceived as monologic and an effort to coerce their listeners. As Timothy Clark points out, "For Christian writers, . . . the notion of inspiration cannot but be fraught with questions about authority. The main reason for this, of course, is the overwhelming authority of the Bible as an inspired text, as the very word of God" (62). In asserting that God "spoke" to them, Isaiah and Ezekiel may be using the authority of God to impose upon their listeners. Ironically, the speaker himself is in the same position as Isaiah and Ezekiel, since as Christoph Bode points out, he is roundly asserting that he dined and conversed with biblical prophets. As Bode puts it, "The problem is, of course, that of the legitimacy and the authorization of the visionary's speech act: what entitles or empowers me or anyone to speak an eternal truth, to reveal a higher reality? This is, of course, a general problem of self-legitimizing, self-authorizing foundational discourse" (11).

In answer to the speaker's question, however, Isaiah's response describes the prophet's source of and faith in his inspiration in an unexpected way: "I saw no God. nor heard any, in a finite organical

perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded. & remain confirm'd; that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences but wrote" (*MHH* 12, E 38). According to Esterhammer, this passage suggests that "Blake reinterprets inspiration as an expanded form of sensory perception" "in attempting to define a concept of inspired poetry that is morally and aesthetically acceptable to him" (*Creating States* 123). Yet by having asserted to the speaker that God had "spoken" to him, Isaiah rhetorically gives the "infinite in every thing" a voice; the infinite "speaks" to him, and he names this other voice "God." Isaiah thus externalizes his imaginative perception of the outside world, rhetorically producing another voice that collaborates with his own and gives his discourse the authority of dialogic inspiration. Another indication of the dialogicality of Isaiah's discourse lies in the fact that he answers the speaker's question, even admitting that he actually "saw no God. nor heard any." Had he been affirming monologic "truth" and claiming that God had authorized it, like the priest in "A Little Boy Lost" in the *Songs of Experience*, he would have refused to answer the speaker's question and would have threatened the speaker with God's punishment for asking. As we have seen in the previous chapter, monologic authority refuses to acknowledge questions of its dictates, stifling the dialogue that could undermine its power. He further notes the responsiveness of his discourse when he calls it "the voice of honest indignation," an indication that his discourse is a reaction to some previous statement, act, or already existing condition with which he disagreed. Moreover, his indignation is "honest," suggesting that he attempts to articulate his unique, individual perspective without duplicitous "Humility." Isaiah remains "confirmed" that since his discourse is dialogically inspired, he claims that he needs not care "for consequences," since unlike self-closed, self-authorized monologue, his discourse is open to the voices of others and is an addition to ongoing dialogue.

Yet, Isaiah's next comments on "a firm perswasion" and Ezekiel's elaboration ironically suggest that even dialogically inspired discourse can be imposing. When the speaker asks Isaiah, "Does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so," Isaiah replies, "All poets believe that it does" (*MHH* 12, E 38). As Stuart Peterfreund notes, inspired discourse sets itself apart from what he calls "the literature of doubt" by acknowledging its "firm perswasion": "The primary difference between prophecy (inspired poetry) and the literature of doubt ('philosophy,' 'rational discourse,' 'dogma,' etc.) is that the former affirms,

even celebrates, its ‘perswasion,’ or interested position, while the latter denies the very existence of such a position” (211).

According to Peterfreund, Blake realizes that while all discourse comes from an “interested position” and applies a “firm perswasion,” the acknowledgment of its interested position prevents it from imposing itself on its addressees. Larrissy adds, “The ‘firm perswasion’ of the honest prophet is not characterized by the univocal, but by the polyphonic, and by the overcoming of barriers between genres and senses” (“Spectral Imposition” 64–65). Bode concurs, “Blake’s art is highly media-conscious, as it continually signals a sense of its own limitations and systematic inadequacy,” since as Blake is aware, “visionary art can never transport the vision itself but only an intersubjective representation of a subjective experience” (11–12). Yet, as Ezekiel explains, the acknowledgment of a “firm perswasion” still does not necessarily inoculate discourse against imposition:

We of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all the others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries, and prophecyng that all Gods would at last be proved. to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius. . . . We so loved our God. that we cursed in his name all the deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled; from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the jews.

This said he, like all firm perswasions, is come to pass, for all nations believe the jews code and worship the jews god, and what greater subjection can be. (*MHH* 12–13, E 39)

Although the people of Israel “taught that the poetic Genius . . . was the first principle,” an idea with which Blake would likely agree, they set it up as an abstract God, causing them to despise other countries’ priests and philosophers and to curse their deities for rebelling. This position strongly affirms the “truth” of one deity and labels all others as erroneous, obscuring the derived origin of the Israelites’ own deity from the Poetic Genius as are the deities of all other nations. As the early *All Religions are One* argues, “The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call’d the Spirit of Prophecy.” Moreover, “The Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius” (*ARO*, E 1). Although the Jewish and Christian Testaments are “an original derivation,” they are, according to Blake, derivations nonetheless, as are the religions of all nations. They are,

then, one derivation among many. Yet although Isaiah and Ezekiel acknowledge their “firm perswasion,” they still lead “the vulgar to think that all nations would at last be subject to the jews.” Certain addressees, “the vulgar,” seize upon the prophets’ exclusionary statements and interpret them not as argued opinion but as absolute “truth.” Instead of treating the prophet’s discourse as an argument that can be refuted, “the vulgar” see it as a statement of unavoidable monologic power against which no one can respond. As Ezekiel comments, this “firm perswasion” “is come to pass,” since “all nations believe the jews code and worship the jews god.” If this monologic “subjection” refers to “the law of ten commandments” (*MHH* 23, E 43) and to the God that “will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies” (*MHH* 4, E 34), Ezekiel ironically implicates the prophets’ discourse in the monologization of “all nations.” Even though their “firm perswasion” is acknowledged and their discourse inspired through dialogue, it is nevertheless the cause of imposition, since the affirmation of an abstraction excludes others from responding to it. By not “caring for consequences,” the prophets inadvertently cause imposition, since their discourse denies some, and eventually all addressees, the opportunity to respond to their argument.

As Isaiah’s and Ezekiel’s discussion of inspiration suggests, even the poet who takes care to acknowledge the dialogic origin of his or her own discourse needs to avoid the abstraction and exclusion that cause imposition in the discourse’s reception. In response to discourse that firmly persuades by means of exclusion and abstraction, the third “Memorable Fancy,” which describes the printing house in Hell and “the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation,” allegorically calls for a more inclusionary method for the production of discourse, incorporating all points of view and all contraries. In this allegory, Blake brings together a series of contrary figures, all of which perform necessary functions in the printing house. As in the story of the Prolific and the Devourer, aspects of the creative process require a consumptive counterpart in order to exist. Within the printing house, “numbers of Eagle like men” build “palaces in the immense cliffs,” and “Lions of Flaming fire [are] raging around & melting the metals into living fluids,” while a Dragon-Man clears “away the rubbish from the caves mouth” (*MHH* 15, E 40). Like the Devourer, this Dragon-Man, it seems, receives the excess of the prolific eaglelike men’s and the lions’ delights. Furthermore, this Dragon-Man may have some connection to reason, as well, in contrast to the creative energy of the eaglelike men and the lions. As Andrew Cooper has noted, Blake may be using the Dragon-Man to parody

Locke's "Epistle to the Reader" in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* ("Irony" 37). Locke writes that he considers himself "an Under-Labourer in clearing the Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to Knowledge" in comparison to the age's "Master-Builders, whose mighty designs . . . will leave lasting Monuments to the Admiration of Posterity" (9–10). Not only does Blake parody Locke, as Cooper notes, but he also incorporates the Dragon-Man and his associations to Locke and Enlightenment reason into the creative process, as a contrary, even stabilizing force opposed to the eaglelike men's and lions' excesses of creative energy. Although prolific, creative energy and the infinity of the imagination are featured in the transmission of knowledge in the printing house in Hell, reason is not excluded from the process, since it is indeed necessary for the process to function. In reformulating the creative process, the *Marriage* seeks to avoid the abstractions and "reconciliations" found in Enlightenment discourse. All faculties and points of view are incorporated into the discursive process, not so they can be reconciled but so they can exist as contraries. Through such an inclusionary process, the "metals" are "cast" "into the expanse," into the sixth and final chamber of the printing house, where they are "*reciev'd* by Men," not imposed on them (*MHH* 15, E 40; emphasis added).

GENRE AND THE ANNIHILATION OF AUTHORIAL SELFHOOD

While the *Marriage* presents a debate incorporating two views of biblical history and argues for an inclusive dialogue in the production and reception of discourse, it also presents *itself* as multivoiced, as dialogically inspired, as a discourse that attempts to avoid imposition. It does not, however, develop its dialogic status through the use of invocation, as most of Blake's other works do. In the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, as I have described, and in most of Blake's later prophecies, a speaker addresses another figure, rhetorically bringing a new voice into the creation of the poem, thereby developing a dialogically inspired discourse that undermines any monologic authorial presence. Indeed, the one example in the *Marriage* that describes this kind of invocative process, Isaiah's discussion about the inspired origin of his prophecies, exposes potential problems that cause imposition in the reception of inspired discourse. Instead, the *Marriage* relies on its unique generic structure to avoid imposition. By employing the Menippean satire genre, as we have noted, it is able to present several points of view in the debate about biblical history and to avoid

coercing or imposing upon the reader. Since Menippean satire uses a variety of genres within itself, it undermines any single authorial presence that could monologically “take sides” in the internal debates, allowing, even inducing, readers to encounter the text through the “process of creative understanding, in which a dialogue is produced between the work’s potentials and the interpreter’s unforeseeable and unique perspective” (Morson and Emerson 415). Instead of a text that coerces its readers into passively accepting its “truth,” Blake generically opens the *Marriage* to a dialogue with the “unforeseeable and unique perspective” of its future readers through the use of the Menippean satire.

According to Bakhtin, the Menippean satire is a genre that through “an extraordinary philosophical universalism and a capacity to contemplate the world on the broadest possible scale,” “ultimate philosophical positions are put to the test. . . . Typical for the menippea is syncrisis (that is, juxtaposition) of precisely such stripped-down ‘ultimate positions in the world.’ . . . Everywhere one meets the stripped-down *pro et contra* of life’s ultimate questions” (*PDP* 115–16). The debate in the *Marriage* juxtaposes, in a “stripped-down” fashion, two “ultimate,” metaphysical positions on biblical history and tests them, “*pro et contra*,” against each other, and to keep these positions in dialogue, to keep them reverberating against each other, authorial presence must be diminished. Otherwise, the authorial presence, the “voice” of the author, will monologically impose on the reader by presenting the metaphysical positions from his or her own perspective and inevitably favoring one side over the other. To distance the authorial presence from the text, the menippea uses what Bakhtin calls “inserted genres,” providing a multifaceted and multivoiced text: “Characteristic of the menippea is a wide use of inserted genres: novella, letters, oratorical speeches, symposia, and so on; also characteristic is a mixing of prose and poetic speech. The inserted genres are presented at various distances from the ultimate authorial position, that is with various degrees of parodying and objectification. . . . The presence of inserted genres reinforces the multi-styled and multi-toned nature of the menippea; what is coalescing here is a new relationship to the word as the material of literature” (*PDP* 118). The mix of “inserted genres” keeps the author’s presence, his Selfhood, out of the debate and allows the positions to be tested against each other. The juxtapositions serve “not for the positive *embodiment* of truth, but as a mode for searching after truth, provoking it, and, most important, *testing* it” (Bakhtin, *PDP* 114). Since truth is provoked

and tested rather than embodied, it allows the reader the opportunity to participate in the debate.

The question of authorial presence in the *Marriage* has been a continual problem for critics. In *Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton*, Joseph A. Wittreich writes that "a larger consciousness" governs the *Marriage* and is "aware of subtleties that his devil does not perceive" (215). According to Wittreich, neither Blake's Angel nor his Devil is aware of the larger implications of their arguments but that the "larger consciousness" of the author juxtaposes these arguments to highlight their subtleties. Cooper, however, argues, "It is difficult to identify that consciousness with any specific authorial persona. 'Blake the true visionary' remains hidden in the interplay of contrary perspectives" ("Irony" 41). Indeed, the lack of "any specific authorial persona" is characteristic of the Menippean satire. The *Marriage* is a collection of poems, narratives, philosophical statements, and proverbs, and each section functions as a self-contained unit that reverberates with the other units. Because of this conglomerate structure, it is difficult to determine whether the speaker of any one section is the same in any of the others. Only the speaker of the section that discusses the errors of "all Bibles or sacred codes" is explicitly identified as "the voice of the Devil" (*MHH* 4, E 34). Other sections, such as the "Memorable Fancies," contain speakers that report on confrontations with Angels and Devils, but it remains unclear whether these speakers are Devils themselves or whether they have anything in common with the speakers of other sections, such as the opening and closing poems. One need look no further than the title page to notice the distancing of authorial presence. The title page of the *Marriage* is the first of Blake's title pages for his illuminated works that does not list his name as "author" of the work, and it is the only one that does not list his name at all.⁶ Blake generically removes every shred of authorial presence in the *Marriage*, annihilating his Selfhood to avoid imposing his own limited perspective on his readers.

While the generic manipulations in the *Marriage* distance authorial presence, they also test received truths and confound the reader's expectations. Appearing to follow the Miltonic tradition of opening with an argument that summarizes the narrative to follow, "The Argument" of the *Marriage* challenges and undermines that tradition. Milton's "Argument" for Book I of *Paradise Lost*, for example, is a prose summary of what is to follow: "This first Book proposes, first in brief, the whole Subject, *Man's disobedience, and the Loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was plac'd*. Then touches the *prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who revolting from God . . . was by*

the command of God driven out of Heaven" (211). Such an argument, which the reader encounters before the text itself, already begins to interpret the poem and to impose the author's view of his text on the reader. In this example, Milton directs the reader's attention to "Man's disobedience" as the cause of his expulsion from Paradise, and to Satan's revolt and God's "command" to drive Satan from Heaven. Before the reader even gets to the events of the poem, Milton has already filled in the interpretive gaps of biblical history for his reader by assigning causes and fixing blame for the fall of humankind on the disobedience of God's discourse, His "command." Blake's "Argument," however, opens a dialogue with Milton by presenting in a poem the story of an argument—the confrontation between the just man and the villain and Rintrah's response—but does not inform the reader of the debate to follow in the rest of the *Marriage*. Although the terms "just man," "the villain," and "the sneaking serpent" offer value judgements to the reader about the two characters in "The Argument," neither character, nor their confrontation, nor any mention of Rintrah appears again in the *Marriage*, inducing the reader to interpret for himself or herself what function "The Argument," its characters, and their confrontation perform for the rest of the work. Instead of imposing the author's perspective of his own discourse, Blake's "Argument" allows the reader to interpret the text creatively and distances authorial presence. By confounding readers' generic expectations, "The Argument" begins the test of truths about Milton without imposing the author's view on the reader.

Among the various generic peculiarities in the *Marriage* that test the contrary sides of its internal debate, the first "Memorable Fancy" and its "Proverbs of Hell" perhaps best exemplify how genre can distance authorial presence and avoid imposition. Marvin D. L. Lansverk has argued that while Blake's proverbs are affirmative statements that are presented with authority and as truth, they are also attempts to restore to proverbial language a creativity that undermines the fixed truths of institutional discourse, proverbs that have become rules or laws like the proverbial discourses of Blake's predecessors, including the Bible, Bunyan, Swedenborg, and Milton. Lansverk states, "Blake tries to get back to the fundamental ethical principle that was in the biblical proverb but has become encrusted over time" (113–14). At the same time, the speaker takes great care to remove himself as the sole authority affirming the truth of the proverbs in his introductory remarks. The speaker explains that during a walk through Hell, "I collected some of their Proverbs: thinking that as the sayings used in a nation, mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell, shew the nature of

Infernal wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments” (*MHH* 6, E 35). According to John Villalobos, proverbs in general and biblical proverbs in particular were often considered in the eighteenth century as important intellectual documents indicating a nation’s or a people’s character. Matthew Henry, the eighteenth-century biblical commentator, writes, “Much of the wisdom of the ancients has been handed down to posterity by proverbs; and some think we may judge of the temper and character of a nation by the complexion of its vulgar proverbs” (qtd. in Villalobos 248). An author’s own “description of buildings or garments” would impose his or her impressions of “a nation” on the reader. To avoid imposition, the speaker presents not his description of Hell but rather Hell’s own discourse, the “Proverbs of Hell.” The speaker’s object, as Richard Cronin describes, is “not [to] define a code of knowledge, but [to] work rather to describe a community of speakers” (53). Of course, the speaker has a hand in selecting and arranging the proverbs, since he has collected “some” of them and presumably excluded others, so he maintains some but not all of the authority for the proverbs’ dissemination. The speaker’s presentation of Hell’s proverbs, then, functions similarly to the inspired dialogue of a poet with his muse in that the discourse of Hell dialogically informs the speaker’s representation of it.

Further reinforcing this similarity, a brief moment of inspiration, much like Blake’s invocations in other poems, occurs when the speaker of the first “Memorable Fancy” returns to “the abyss of the five senses”:

I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock, with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence now perceived by the minds of men, & read by them on earth.

How do you know but ev’ry Bird that cuts the airy way,

Is an immense world of delight, clos’d by your senses five? (*MHH* 6–7, E 35)

In this case, the muse is a Devil offering a “sentence” that the speaker presents to his readers. Instead of affirming his own understanding of “truth” as the only one, the speaker’s representation of Hell is dialogically informed by the discourse of Hell itself. In addition to the speaker’s abdicating sole authority for the representation of Hell, the proverbs, as a collection of discrete aphoristic statements, lack any of the connective or interpretive devices that an author could impose on them, requiring the reader to interpret them creatively and to construct for himself or herself the “nature of Infernal wisdom.” The

juxtapositions of proverbs and the reverberations of similar themes provide the readers with an opportunity to respond to them from their unique perspectives. To “the religious,” who expect authorially imposed meaning to fix interpretation, a text that provokes a reader’s creative response “looks like torment and insanity,” but for Blake, discourses open to the dialogue of creative understanding are “the enjoyments of Genius” (*MHH* 6, E 35).

Much like the “Proverbs,” or the interdiscursive lyrics of the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, the individual sections of the *Marriage* operate as a series of fragments that “speak” to each other as separate voices in dialogue. As they raise questions about imposition in discourse, and about whether imposition can be circumvented, they leave these questions unanswered, inducing the reader to engage in the *Marriage*’s dialogue. Both sides of the debate that takes place within the *Marriage* are tested against each other, yet they are never fully reconciled and remain as contrary positions. The fragmentary nature of the Menippean satire undoes the controlling authorial presence that would fix interpretation, commanding the covering cherub of the author’s Selfhood “to leave his guard” over the text and cleansing “the doors” of the reader’s perception, opening them to infinite unfinalizability (*MHH* 14, E 39). In his annotations to Watson’s *Apology for the Bible*, Blake writes, “If Moses did not write the history of his acts. it takes away the authority altogether it ceases to be history & becomes a Poem of probable impossibilities fabricated for pleasure as moderns say but I Say by Inspiration” (E 616). In the *Marriage* as in his other works throughout his career, Blake seeks to remove “the authority altogether” by annihilating the imposition of Selfhood, opening his work to the “probable impossibilities” of dialogic “Inspiration.”

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CHAPTER 3



THE [FIRST] BOOK OF URIZEN

THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORIAL SELFHOOD

In *The [First] Book of Urizen*, William Blake develops some of the issues of communication raised in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* by describing the origin of what he would later call Selfhood, its proliferation of self-closed discourse, and the disruption of dialogue. Thus far, we have seen that in the *Songs*, Blake explores how individuals struggle to find a place dialogically within the already existing community of discourse, while social institutions impose their own voices on individuals. As individuals lose their identity to the social institution, they in turn become agents of the institution and aid in the inculcation of new individuals. Similarly, the *Marriage* presents a confrontation between the powerful voice of the established Angelic order and the rebellious voice of the Devil, which rejects the hegemonic hold the Angelic order has on human history and the discourse that describes it; yet when the excluded Devils themselves gain discursive power, they, too, exhibit the same monologic tendencies of their predecessors. In both the *Songs* and the *Marriage*, Blake explores the power of the monologic Selfhood that affirms its own view as the only “true” one and denies others the opportunity in the dialogic construction of truth. The discourse of Selfhood, then, is self-closed, since it ignores the viewpoints of others in all stages of composition, dissemination, and reception. While these two earlier works explore the problem of monologic power and individual identity in medias res, as it were, *Urizen* goes back in mythic time to uncover the origin of the first Selfhood, the first discursive imposition, and the regeneration of self-closed discourse. In

this return to origins, Blake begins to develop the root causes of some of the sociolinguistic problems he explored in his earlier works.

In developing the origins of Selfhood and self-closed discourse, *Urizen* dramatizes the disruption of dialogue that occurs when the first Selfhood emerges. In the poem, Urizen retreats from the rest of Eternity, effectively removing himself from any possibility of dialogue with others, and in solitude produces “books formd of metal” that lack the multiplicity of perspectives that dialogically inspired discourse acknowledges. When he emerges from his solitude, he presents his books as absolute truth, as “one Law” that seeks to enclose and to systematize the boundlessness and flux of Eternity and the ongoing process of dialogue, even though his discourse can only represent his own limited perspective of Eternity (*U* 4.24, 40, *E* 72). Angela Esterhammer has explained that “in place of a creator whose spoken words articulate the cosmos, *The Book of Urizen* portrays a demiurge whose written decrees establish a restrictive world order” and that with Urizen, Blake ironizes Milton’s god “by having his deity engage in arbitrary naming and issue oppressive speech acts” (*Creating States* 153). As Mark L. Barr has noted, Blake saw “monarchy falsely legitimize itself through a putative derivation from scriptural rule,” supporting itself “by an interpretation of the Bible asserting that obedience to the monarch’s rule was ‘one of the general duties of Christianity’” (741). Moreover, the kind of discursive power that Urizen exhibits parallels what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as extreme monologism: “Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness and with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme and pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness” (*PDP* 292–93). Monologism, according to Bakhtin, derives its power from the denial of the equal rights of respondents by considering them only as objects of its own consciousness. Were others allowed to respond, they could offer new ideas that could alter the monologic perspective. By retreating into solitude, Urizen becomes “self-closed, all-repelling,” and for him, the other Eternals become objects of his consciousness (*U* 3.3, *E* 70). Since they have lost their equal rights as consciousnesses from his perspective, he denies that each member of the Eternals has his or her own viewpoint with equal status to his own. Urizen thus imposes his viewpoint on the Eternals and expects no response from them, because any differing response

from their perspective would “change everything in the world of [Urizen’s] consciousness.”

Since the Eternals become objects of Urizen’s consciousness and are denied the right of response, they become characters in his book, finalized by Urizen’s imposed perspective, his authorial Selfhood.¹ As Bakhtin puts it, “The external world in which the characters of the story live and die is the *author’s world*, an objective world vis-à-vis the consciousnesses of the characters. Everything within it is seen and portrayed in the author’s all-encompassing and omniscient field of vision. . . . All these things [the world, the characters, and their subjective perceptions of it] are . . . parts of one and the same objective world, seen and portrayed from *one and the same authorial position*” (PDP 71). Under these circumstances, “A dialogic relationship of the author to his heroes is impossible, and thus there is no ‘*great dialogue*’ in which characters and author might participate with equal rights” (Bakhtin, PDP 71). Instead, the author expresses only his point of view and produces only the objectivized dialogues of the characters. From “the depths of dark solitude,” Urizen concocts his view of Eternity and imposes it on others through his monologically self-closed book (*U* 4.6, E 71). Eternity becomes part of “one and the same objective world” within Urizen’s “omniscient field of vision,” and others’ equal rights of dialogic participation are stifled.

In *Urizen*, as in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, such disregard creates a rebellious backlash that can result in a kind of reactive monologism. As individuals begin to establish their own unfinalizability against oppressive imposition, they often become oppressors themselves, affirming their own points of view as truth and denying their former oppressors their once-imposing voice. Indeed, the Eternals respond to Urizen’s laws with their own imposition by enclosing him in a globe and confining him with the “Tent of Science” (*U* 19.2–9, E 78). Instead of responding to Urizen and engaging him in dialogue, and thus establishing their own unfinalizability against Urizen’s self-closed imposition, the Eternals themselves act Urizenically and disallow Urizen’s voice in dialogic exchange. Although Urizen attempts to curtail dialogue with his self-closed law, he succeeds only in initiating the continuous reproduction of self-closure as others assert their own viewpoints as truth and make Urizen an object of their own consciousnesses. While *Milton* will later propose self-annihilation as a way to avoid the imposition inherent in authorial Selfhood, *Urizen* offers no such end to the cycle of dominance through Selfhood.

In describing the origins of Selfhood, however, Blake attempts to undo the imposition of self-closed discourse, to annihilate his own

authorial Selfhood, and to reestablish dialogue by undermining any tendency toward self-closure. To open his discourse to dialogic inspiration, Blake employs an invocation to the Eternals at the beginning of the poem that rhetorically positions his discourse as one informed by the discourse of others. The speaker of the poem addresses the Eternals and says, "I hear your call gladly, / Dictate swift winged words, & fear not / To unfold your dark visions of torment" (*U* 2.5–7, E 70). With this invocation, the speaker acknowledges that the source for his poem comes from outside himself in a dialogue with the Eternals. As Timothy Clark explains, the poet's address to the muse blurs boundaries of muse, poet, and auditors and creates "a situation that seems parodical, even self-contradictory, to modern thinking" (42–43). Barr has shown that this strategy is part of the "madness" of *Urizen*, which is Blake's attempt to prevent his discourse from being stratified into law, as Blake believed biblical prophecy had become in the service of the state (742). Here the poet does not assume the authorial position, which would lead him to treat all others as objects of his own consciousness; instead, he includes others in the formation of his discourse. The poem becomes a dialogic response to the Eternals' description of *their* "dark visions of torment" and includes a multiplicity of viewpoints—the Eternals, plural—that undoes the monologic imposition of the self-closed authorial position (*U* 2.7, E 70). Instead of being told from a single authorial viewpoint, one describing the Eternals as objects of its own consciousness, the poem contains not only the viewpoint of its speaker but also those of the Eternals, who, according to the invocation, inform the speaker's discourse.

Blake also exploits the arbitrary nature of the sign, using numerous puns and syntactical difficulties to undermine any authorial monopoly on meaning and to open the poem to the reader's creative understanding.² We have noted in the introduction that unlike Locke, who claims that the arbitrary nature of the sign forces speakers to use signs in only the most limited ways, Blake finds that the sign's arbitrariness opens it to infinite creativity for both speaker and recipient. Locke finds the arbitrary nature of the sign an impediment to communication because signs only stand for ideas in the mind of the speaker. Both speaker and listener must then adhere to convention as closely as possible in their use and interpretation of signs in order for communication to take place. Even a motivated sign, with a one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified, would severely limit both the speaker's and listener's ability to create meaning actively. Blake uses the arbitrary sign as an opportunity for creativity in both expression and understanding. Indeed, this verbal destabilization of

the monologic authorial position begins as early as the title. The “of” in *The [First] Book of Urizen* suggests that Blake’s book could be a story “about” Urizen, or it could refer to the book “by” him, shifting the reader’s focus away from Blake’s book about Urizen to Urizen’s own book and its effects on Eternity. The name Urizen itself suggests a number of associations, as Nelson Hilton has shown, including “you risen,” “your reason,” “horizon” as the limit of perception, “your eyes in” indicating self-contemplation, and “ur-reason” as the primary assumptions that come before reason (*Literal Imagination* 254–55). Throughout the poem, Blake uses the arbitrary nature of the sign against the monologic imposition of the Urizenic author, provoking the reader to respond individually and dialogically and to participate in the creation of the poem’s meaning.

Finally, Blake uses his own method of book production, more so in *Urizen* than in any other of his illuminated books, to undermine the ways in which the print medium aids in the establishment of a monologic authorial position. Eight copies of *Urizen* are known to exist, yet none of the copies is identical. Not only are the full page illustrations rearranged in the different copies, but the plates of text also appear in different orders in all but two copies, D and G. And even these copies are strikingly different because the word “first” in the title, *The First Book of Urizen*, is erased from the title page, “Preludium,” and colophon in copy G, dismissing the notion of a sequential series of books of *Urizen* and leading modern editors to put “first” in brackets.³ Rather than one book in eight copies, there seem to be, rather, eight different books of *Urizen*, each with its own, somewhat different version of the Urizen story. As Terence Allan Hoagwood notes, “These irreducible differences, the stubborn material discreteness of each work, and even of each plate, are signs of the materiality of the texts. These differences are, with or without Blake’s intention, signs that art is work—a practice, something done—and not a set of ideas” (100). Each finished “copy” of *Urizen* comes to the reader as a separate *work* of art, a separate retelling, or performance, of the Urizen story. Rather than one version presented to all readers in identically produced copies, a situation that could be seen as consolidating the author’s authority over the presentation and reception of the story, *Urizen* is told, or performed, uniquely in each “copy,” placing more emphasis on the presentation than on the presenter or the ideas presented. The variations in these performances diminish the author’s monopoly on the production of meaning and afford readers the opportunity to interpret the story of Urizen creatively as they negotiate these variations.

Such arrangements of plates producing eight different, original copies under a similar, if not identical, title undermines the cultural trends that mass-produced book production fostered in the late eighteenth century. In discussing this cultural shift, Alvin Kernan writes, "Print logic began to shape mental structures, imparting a sense of the world as a set of abstract ideas rather than immediate facts, a fixed point of view organizing all subject matter into an equivalent of perspective in painting, and the visual homogenization of experience" (51). By producing a multitude of exact copies of a text, print technology can be seen as imposing the same text, the same utterance, on every reader, fixing the author's point of view as an organizing force that collectivizes the minute particulars of reality into abstract ideas. The "fixed point of view" of the authorial position representing the world in abstract terms gives printed matter a "kind of authority [that] grew into the authenticity that is probably the absolute mark of print culture, a generally accepted view that what is printed is true, or at least truer than any other type of record" (Kernan 49). The authority of print gives the authorial position the power to affirm monologically the "truth" of its utterance and to claim authenticity for its point of view, denying readers an opportunity to respond to the author. Blake, however, responds to this cultural shift by restoring opportunities for creative understanding to the reader's experience through the eight different tellings of the *Urizen* story that the eight different "copies" represent. Blake's printing process reincorporates dialogue into the experience of reading mechanically reproduced printed matter by making each "copy" of his book a separate telling of the *Urizen* story. The variations in each retelling reestablish the reader's position as necessary for the creation of meaning in print culture.

THE SELF-CLOSED AUTHOR IN *URIZEN*

According to *Urizen*, Selfhood and self-closed discourse seem to begin when one individual, Urizen, separates himself from the rest of Eternity. The opening of the poem describes Urizen's initial separation and the disruption it creates:

Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
 In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
 Self-closd, all repelling: What Demon
 Hath form'd this abominable void
 This soul-shudd'ring vacuum?—Some said
 "It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted

Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

Dark revolving in silent activity;
 Unseen in tormenting passions;
 An activity unknown and horrible;
 A self-contemplating shadow,
 In enormous labours occupied. (*U* 3.1–7, 18–22, *E* 70–71)

As Urizen retreats, others, presumably the Eternals, notice his unresponsive, “silent activity” and consider his absence as horrible and “soul-shudd’ring” torment. They also establish themselves as a community in which some form of dialogic interaction exists, since their first reaction to Urizen’s “self-closed, all repelling” silence takes the form of a question and a response:

What Demon
 Hath form’d this abominable void
 This soul-shudd’ring vacuum?—Some said
 “It is Urizen.” (*U* 3.3–6, *E* 70)

When Urizen’s separation occurs and produces an interruption in Eternity, the Eternals respond by filling the silence with a question about the origin of the interruption.⁴ The answer, “It is Urizen,” applies a name to the unknown origin of the interruption and, in effect, makes the interruption a part of dialogue. As Urizen turns his back on the Eternals and leaves a gap of silence in his wake, the Eternals’ initial instinct is to supply that silence with linguistic response and to reconstitute Urizen as part of their dialogic community. Nevertheless, Urizen’s “unprolific” separation places him in an unnatural, “self-closed” “vacuum” and wrenches him away from the very ground of dialogic existence. In writing about the nature of human consciousness, Bakhtin comments on “the impossibility of solitude, the illusory nature of solitude. The very being of man (both external and internal) is the *deepest communion*. To be means to communicate” (*PDP* 287). By removing himself from dialogue, Urizen places himself in the strange and illusory state of solitude in which he turns inward to contemplate himself and loses the communion of dialogue, the very essence of being.

In discussing Urizen’s initial separation and the Eternal’s response, Robert N. Essick writes, “The primal act in *Urizen* is the autotelic self-separation of the demiurge from his fellow ‘Eternals.’ This event immediately constitutes, and is constituted by, *difference* as the

fundamental ontological category. . . . Difference becomes the interstices that define mutually exclusive identities, be they ideas, things, or words. . . . By creating difference, Urizen creates the meta-semiotic ground for a language based on a differential matrix" (*William Blake* 149–50). According to Essick, Urizen's separation from the Eternals initiates the situation in which difference becomes the basis for being and the foundation for a differential system of language. If Urizen creates difference, however, no dialogue could have occurred among the Eternals prior to Urizen's separation, since dialogue depends on the difference between speaking subjects. According to Bakhtin, dialogue requires at least two separate voices: "It is in the reaction of the other person, in his discourse and his response, that the whole matter lies" (*PDP* 214). Without a separate and different other, the lone speaker would address his or her discourse to no one and would receive no response. Without the responsiveness of others, dialogue cannot occur. Indeed, the response of the Eternals suggests that difference as a necessary condition for dialogue already exists among them. In answering the question posed about the origin of the separation, "*Some* said / 'It is Urizen,'" indicating that the voices in Eternity are distinct since some, but not all, speak (*U* 3.5–6, *E* 70; emphasis added). Since some of the Eternals reply to the question and others remain silent, possibly functioning as listeners, difference can be seen as a condition existing prior to Urizen's separation, suggesting that the community of the Eternals is a dialogic one. When Urizen separates from the Eternals, however, difference becomes an impenetrable, insurmountable wall behind which Urizen retreats. The problem of *Urizen*, then, is not so much that Urizen initiates difference as the fundamental ontological and linguistic category in Eternity, but that through Urizen's separation, difference becomes a barrier to dialogic communication and an opportunity for monologic imposition.

The necessity of difference for dialogue and the Selfhood's abuse of difference also correspond to Blake's theory of the outline in his illuminations and paintings. In *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* for his exhibition of 1809, Blake writes, "The great and golden rule of art, as well as life, is this: that the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the greater is the more perfect work of art; . . . Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist" (*E* 550). This "bounding line" marks the visual identity of each figure and differentiates one figure from another. Without it, everything descends into the cacophony of chaos. As Anne Kostelanetz Mellor notes, "Only the divine imagination can transcend the limiting

categories of reason and perceive the holiness of everything that lives, but its perceptions need to be articulated in clear, specific, and carefully outlined forms if they are to survive in a skeptical world and command the allegiance of other minds. Thus the imagination uses the ordering, organizing faculties of reason to execute its chosen images" (236). Difference is essential if the imagination is to represent specific, discrete forms, even as difference is transcended. The problem of Selfhood occurs when reason oversteps its proper function, usurping the place of imagination and thwarting the transcendence of difference through dialogic interaction.

From his position in solitude removed from the dialogue of the Eternals, Urizen begins to impose his own limited point of view on all of Eternity:

Times on times he divided, & measur'd
Space by space in his ninefold darkness
Unseen, unknown! changes appeard
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation. (*U* 3.8–12, E 70)

From his position of solitude outside the community of the Eternals, Urizen begins to divide time and measure space, and these divisions and measurements create convulsive changes. As Harald Kittel notes, "[Urizen] determines the analytic approach to, and thereby fashions, reality in accordance with the reductive structure of human consciousness of which he is the poetic embodiment" (33). Urizen's methods of dividing and measuring are his own, and when he imposes them on Eternity, he reconfigures reality according to his analytic methods. Indeed, he must struggle to reshape reality, forcing it to correspond to his interpretation in that "he strove in battles dire / In unseen conflictions with shapes Bred from his forsaken wilderness" (*U* 3.13–15, E 70). Instead of recognizing reality's otherness, Urizen views reality as an object of his consciousness and reshapes it to his singular perspective. Without the multiplicity of perspectives to inform his own, Urizen has no corrective mechanism to prevent him from imposing his own limited perspective on reality. Urizen's "activity" is "silent" (*U* 3.18, E 71), removed from the dialogue that would prevent or correct these contortions of individual perspective.

When Urizen finally emerges from his solitude, he presents his "books formd of metals" containing "the secrets of wisdom / The secrets of dark contemplation" (*U* 4.25–26, E 72). The construction of Urizen's books has occurred in solitude, and the "secrets"

they contain are devoid of the responsiveness of others that would give his books a dialogic foundation. These books represent his own self-closed interpretation of Eternity, and when he presents them, he describes his compositional process as one of imposition:

First I fought with fire; consum'd
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild dark & deep,
Where nothing was: Natures wide womb

And self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void
I alone, even I! the winds merciless
Bound; but condensing, in torrents
They fall and fall; strong I repell'd
The vast waves, & arose on the waters
A wide world of solid obstruction. (*U* 4.14–23, *E* 72)

As Urizen retreats from the “fire” of dialogue into “a deep world within,” he encounters “a void immense” in the absence of the Eternal community of dialogue. In that void, he monologically forces nature to conform to his own viewpoint. He binds the winds, causing them to fall in torrents, and he repels vast waves to raise “a wide world of solid obstruction.” Although he claims to be “balanc’d,” he is merely “self-balanc’d,” leaving his singular perspective unbalanced by the perspective of another. “Alone” and “self-balanc’d,” Urizen, through his separation, changes the nature of difference from a condition that allows for the distinct voices that foster dialogue to one that causes isolation, barriers to communication, and monologic imposition. His utterances, spoken or written, become self-closed and monologic, because all others become objects of his consciousness, and as objects, they cannot respond as equal consciousnesses to his discourse. Urizen constructs for himself his own finalized version of reality, imposing his own viewpoint over the external world, written in his books.

As objects of Urizen’s consciousness, all others become characters in Urizen’s book, fixed and finalized by his point of view and his utterances. Bakhtin describes the monologic construction of an author’s perspective: “The construction of the authorial world with its point of view and finalizing definitions, presupposes a fixed external position, a fixed authorial field of vision. The self-consciousness of the hero is inserted into this rigid framework, to which the hero has no access from within and which is part of the authorial consciousness defining and representing him” (*PDP* 52). From his external position,

Urizen constructs a fixed representation of Eternity and inserts it into the rigid framework devised from his own authorial consciousness. The Eternals have no access to the construction of Urizen's book and become a part of his consciousness as he represents them. In taking control of the discursive process, Urizen gains a monopoly over the creation of meaning and denies others any participation in that process. In the monologic assumption of discursive power,

the author's field of vision nowhere intersects or collides dialogically with the characters' fields of vision or attitudes, nowhere does the word of the author encounter resistance from the hero's potential word, a word that might illuminate the same object differently, in its own way—that is, from the vantage point of its own *truth*. The author's point of view cannot encounter the hero's point of view on one plane, on one level. The point of view of the hero (in those places where the hero lets it be seen) always remains an object of the author's point of view. (Bakhtin, *PDP* 71)

In Urizen's book, the only voice allowed is his own and all other points of view are excluded, even though other points of view could shed light on a different, perhaps better, truth than those formed in Urizen's construction. Any other points of view represented in his book always remain the objects of his consciousness.

In developing these "secrets," Urizen's guiding objective is to find "a joy without pain" and "a solid without fluctuation" (*U* 4.10–11, *E* 71), yet such an endeavor would be akin to the reconciling of contraries that Blake describes in the story of the Prolific and the Devourer in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, whereby the monologic privileging of one contrary over the other ends their dialogic existences through imposition. Indeed, Urizen privileges his own perspective when he describes his isolated position as "the eternal abode in my holiness" (*U* 4.7, *E* 71). He thereby elevates his position to a religious level. He even adopts the name for those whom he monologizes, "eternal," for his own self-closed status. Like the Angel in the *Marriage*, Urizen sees the constant unfinalizable flux of eternal dialogue as the burning agonies of Hell: "Why will you die O Eternals? / Why live in unquenchable burnings?" (*U* 4.12–13, *E* 71). For Urizen, the unfinalizability of dialogue produces burning agony, and his aim is to finalize eternal flux with his book of law, taking his own, limited viewpoint and fancying it the whole.

As he displays his books to Eternity, Urizen thus presents his own viewpoint not as a limited perspective but as unquestionable truth. He explains that the "terrible monsters Sin-bred," the "Seven deadly

Sins of the soul” with which he fought during the construction of his law, “inhabit” “the bosoms of all” (*U* 4.28–30, *E* 72). While Urizen finds the seven deadly sins only in himself, he claims that they inhabit the souls of all others as well, even though his solitude prevents contact with these others. What he finds in himself, then, he projects onto others. According to Marilyn Gaull, such a discursive strategy was common in the writings of eighteenth-century social, economic, and political thinkers such as Adam Smith, Thomas R. Malthus, Jeremy Bentham, and Edmund Burke: “They saw in the world about them reflections of their personal if not subjective experience, which they universalized. The social models they formulated, then, were inventions rather than discoveries, autobiographical allegories verifying their own experience or ideals” (112). While in solitude, Urizen constructs a vision of his own invention that he universalizes as the experience of all individuals. Moreover, he is adopting the politicized authority that biblical scholars in Blake’s day, like Robert Lowth, saw in biblical language, as Esterhammer points out: “The result is a text in which utterance . . . indeed has performative force, but this power carries negative connotations of imposition and even violence” (“Calling into Existence” 117–18). Urizen’s book expects each to

chuse one habitation:

His ancient infinite mansion:

One command, one joy, one desire,

One curse, one weight, one measure

One King, one God, one Law. (*U* 4.36–40, *E* 72)

The eternal actually have no choice, since according to Urizen, only one version of reality exists. In commenting on these lines, Essick writes that Urizen’s weapon “is a magisterial book establishing the ‘one Law’ of univocal meanings as the agency through which ‘One King’ and ‘one God’ can project their rule” (*William Blake* 154). Urizen’s books of law are his tool for coercing others to accept his understanding of reality as univocal.

Toward the end of the poem, the effects of Urizen’s insistence on “one Law” become evident. Urizen wanders in the world that his self-closed law has created, and “drawing out from his sorrowing soul” is the “Net of Religion,” a privileged discourse that “none could break” (*U* 25.11, 22, 19, *E* 82). His imposed law has now become a “net of infection,” “a woven hypocrisy” that shrinks the senses, narrows perception, and finalizes interpretation (*U* 25.30, 32, *E* 82). Yet, as Urizen views his creation,

his soul sicken'd, he curs'd
 Both sons & daughters; for he saw
 That no flesh nor spirit could keep
 His iron laws one moment. (*U* 23.23–26, *E* 81)

Because Urizen's laws represent his own, singular perspective, others cannot possibly live in accordance with them. Each individual has his or her own different perspective, and only dialogue between individuals can accommodate those differences without suppressing them. Urizen's sons and daughters are cursed because his iron law enforces his perspective and forbids the dialogue that would allow all perspectives to flourish. Instead, "they shrunk up from existence" "and forgot their eternal life" (*U* 25.39, 42, *E* 83). As characters of Urizen's book, his sons and daughters become finalized and finite, cut off from dialogue and infinite unfinalizability.

THE MONOLOGIC BACKLASH AND THE REPLICATION OF SELF-CLOSURE

As we have seen in our discussion of the *Marriage*, Blake suggests that when one individual assumes the linguistic high ground and monologically controls interpretive and discursive processes, other individuals resist such power and attempt to overthrow it. If they succeed, however, they often resort to the same monologic tactics that their oppressors utilized. A similar situation occurs in *Urizen*. Immediately after Urizen imposes his laws on Eternity, the Eternals react with the fury of Rintrah in the *Marriage*:

Rage siez'd the strong

Rage, fury, intense indignation
 In cataracts of fire blood & gall
 In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
 And enormous forms of energy. (*U* 4.44–48, *E* 72)

While Urizen tries to seize a monopoly on discourse, to eliminate dialogue, and finalize Eternity, the Eternals respond with force, fury, and "intense indignation" in order to prevent lapsing into silent nonexistence and to maintain dialogue. According to Bakhtin, such a reaction to finalization is to be expected: "All acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render *untrue* any external and finalizing definition of them. As

long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word. . . . Man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made; man is free, and can therefore violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him" (*PDP* 59). As Urizen imposes his laws on Eternity, the Eternals immediately attempt to "render *untrue*" Urizen's "firm calculations." To remain silent and accept Urizen's "finalizing definition" would compromise the Eternals' dialogic freedom and force them to be subsumed by Urizen's "regulating norms."

Indeed, the Eternals' indignant response to Urizen's finalizing laws would seem to have been anticipated by those very laws to nullify any contrary response to them. As the Eternals express indignation to Urizen's imposition,

All the seven deadly sins of the soul

In living creations appear'd

In the flames of eternal fury. (*U* 4.49–5.2, *E* 72)

Urizen has previously claimed that the seven deadly sins "the bosoms of all inhabit" (*U* 4.29, *E* 72), and as the Eternals respond to Urizen's laws, those seven deadly sins immediately appear in "the flames" of "eternal fury." Urizen's laws create the seven deadly sins, and they appear "in living creations" when the Eternals act with fury against those laws. This appearance of the seven deadly sins "in the flames of eternal fury" suggests that the Eternals' energetic response is already demonized by Urizen's laws. These laws, which force each individual to "chuse one habitation," anticipate the Eternals' furious response by disallowing any position, or "habitation," contrary to Urizen's (*U* 4.36, *E* 72). As the Eternals respond indignantly to the laws' imposition, those laws already operate to suppress their response by branding it as sinful. In this situation, Urizen enforces his imposition by writing laws that demonize response to them.

The Eternals, however, seem to exhibit their own tendency toward monologism and self-closure in their treatment of Urizen. The first hint of this tendency appears in the "Preludium's" mention of the poem's subject:

Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,

When Eternals spurn'd back his religion;

And gave him a place in the north,

Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary. (*U* 2.1–4, *E* 70)

Here, the Eternals “spurn’d back” Urizen’s “religion” and relegate him to the void of obscurity, thereby enforcing his separation and excluding him from dialogue. As W. J. T. Mitchell has noted, “Urizen’s mistake is trying to create *through law* a world like the one he has fallen from, a world where ‘Death was not’—or at least not perceived. The Eternals mistake is that they refuse to contemplate and absorb what Urizen has discovered” (*Blake’s Composite Art* 129). As the Eternals counter Urizen’s imposed laws, they refuse to address Urizen as part of the Eternal dialogue, thereby excluding him from dialogue and keeping him separate. Later in the poem, as Urizen “lay, clos’d, unknown / Brooding shut in the deep,” the Eternals “beheld” the separation and “avoid / The petrific abominable chaos,” suggesting that they maintain, rather than ameliorate, the separation (*U* 3.23–26, *E* 71). By “avoiding” Urizen, the Eternals void his place in dialogue. In avoiding the Selfhood that Urizen creates, they also help to sustain it.

Even the Eternals’ attempt to alleviate Urizen’s separation by naming him could be seen as an act of imposition rather than dialogic amelioration, since he appears not to give himself a name, as Esterhammer has noted (*Creating States* 154). The naming of Urizen here is reminiscent of the act of naming a child, as in “Infant Joy” in the *Songs of Innocence*. As we noted in discussing that poem, naming both introduces a child to the community of discourse as a new participant and imposes the community’s socializing forces on the individual, since the child cannot respond to the application of the name supplied by the community. In the attempt to recognize this new other as a member of the discursive community, the community often gives the other little say in how that recognition takes place. Hence, as Urizen’s separation forms a new other in Eternity, the Eternals’ attempt to reconcile that separation, giving it the name “Urizen,” might be seen as enforcing that separation and imposing the status of otherness on it, especially since one of the name’s connotations is “you risen.” To take this point further, one could then possibly view Urizen’s laws as a reaction to his having been named by others, a reaction that functions to undermine the regulating norms that his name imposes on him. When Urizen emerges and presents his laws, he would then be attempting to establish his perspective in an already existent discursive community and competing for a discrete, independent place in it. Although this possibility is difficult to maintain when one considers the coercive associations Urizen has throughout Blake’s work, it could suggest a kind of Blakean hedge against the complete abandonment of everything that Urizen stands for. If we recall the organization of

the printing house of Hell in the *Marriage*, we realize that the Dragon-Man, who signifies Lockean reason, performs a necessary role in the printing house by clearing the rubbish from the cave's mouth. The prolific eaglelike men and lions need him to devour their excess, and to exclude him completely would undermine their very existences. Like the Dragon-Man, Urizen must not be allowed to seize control of the Eternals' dialogic process, but neither should he be entirely excluded. Or, to recall the terms of Blake's theory of the outline, reason and the outline are necessary for making distinctions but should never be allowed to usurp the creative power of the imagination.

The Eternals' continued response to Urizen's divisive laws results in further separation, mainly because rather than trying to ameliorate self-closure through dialogue, the Eternals' goal is to contain Urizen with their own monologic discourses, thereby enforcing, even reproducing, self-closure. After "Eternity roll'd wide apart," all that remain are "ruinous fragments of life / Hanging frowning cliffs & all between / An ocean of voidness unfathomable" (*U* 5.5, 9–11, *E* 73). Individuals no longer connected by dialogue have become fragmented and divided, and in order to contain the fragmentation, the Eternals delegate Los to watch over Urizen:

And Los round the dark globe of Urizen,
Kept watch for Eternals to confine,
The obscure separation alone;
For Eternity stood wide apart. (*U* 5.38–41, *E* 73)

Sent to keep watch over Urizen, Los is "alone," creating another separation that also maintains the old one. While Los "confines" Urizen, Los is now separated from both Eternity and Urizen. Los's weapon in maintaining self-closure is, not surprisingly, monologic discourse:

Los formed nets & gins
And threw the nets round about

He watch'd in shuddring fear
The dark changes & bound every change
With rivets of iron & brass. (*U* 8.7–11, *E* 74)

As Urizen's laws had formed the Net of Religion to halt the constant flux of Eternity, so Los produces "nets & gins" that bind change with metallic rigidity. As Edward Larrissy explains, "The language used to describe the form Los imposes on Urizen suggests harsh bondage and

limitation" (*William Blake* 131–32). Like Urizen's laws, Los's nets and gins result in the "forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity" that reduces an individual's interpretive and discursive functioning (*U* 10.24, E 75). As the imposition of monologism paralyzes an individual's ability to respond and to question, the individual is subsumed into the totalizing, single consciousness of monologic order. Los's imposition eventually forms a body for Urizen, a metaphorical finalization that marks Los's discourse as monologically self-closed. When the body is formed, Urizen is irrevocably removed from dialogue, and his never-ending unfinalizable life is over. Without dialogue, "eternal life" is "like a dream" "obliterated," and nothing but the deathlike slumber of finalization remains (*U* 13.33–34, E 77).

As Urizen's body is completed, Los, "in terrors" "shrunk from his task," realizing that he has committed the same discursive imposition that Urizen did (*U* 13.20, E 77). Los "becomes what he beheld," "a cold solitude and dark void / the Eternal Prophet & Urizen clos'd" (*U* 13.39–40, E 77). His "bellows and hammer" fall into a "nerveless silence" as "his prophetic voice / Siez'd" (*U* 13.37–39, E 77). No longer fashioning monologic nets and gins, Los, the "Eternal Prophet," falls silent as he realizes that he has practiced monologic imposition against Urizen. The very voice of eternal prophecy has cut itself off from dialogue, and because of his imposition, Los suffers the same fate as Urizen. Both are "cut off from life and light frozen / Into horrible forms of deformity" (*U* 13.42–43, E 77). Both are cut off from dialogue and have become finalized. Once Los realizes his error,

Then he look'd back with anxious desire
But the space undivided by existence
Struck horror into his soul. (*U* 13.45–47, E 77)

Los's looking "back with anxious desire" suggests that he is looking back to the Eternals and the discursive community he once enjoyed. The space between himself and the Eternals, which is "undivided by existence," appears not to support dialogue, since dialogue depends on the difference that distinguishes one voice from another. Los, locked in the egocentrism of Selfhood, looks upon this space with "horror," because any return to dialogue would necessitate crossing this space and risking the loss of the individuation that Selfhood provides, however isolating it may be. To cross this space would require self-annihilation, the abandonment of Selfhood, for Los to engage others in dialogue. As we shall see in Chapter 5, this simultaneous desire for and abhorrence of self-annihilation is more fully explored in

Jerusalem when Albion realizes his error of Selfhood. He wants to annihilate his Selfhood, but he fears the possible dissolution of identity that self-annihilation implies more than the finalizing death of Selfhood: "O that Death & Annihilation were the same!" (*J* 23.40, E 169). What neither Albion nor Los realize is that they can retain their individual identities through dialogue even after they abandon their Selfhoods. While the poem hints at the possibility of self-annihilation, it does not seem to be available to Los.

As Los contemplates the finalization of Urizen, he feels pity for him:

He saw Urizen deadly black,
In chains bound, & Pity began,

In anguish dividing and dividing
For pity divides the soul. (*U* 13.50–53, E 77)

Los, whose nest and gins have subdued Urizen, is now in a position of power over him, a condition that breeds pity, as we have noted in our discussion of "The Human Abstract" in the *Songs of Experience*. In that poem, pity is a function of the division of social class, where those in power "make" others "poor" and create a feeling of pity for the powerless that maintains class division (*SIE* 47.2, E 27). In *Urizen*, not only are Los and Urizen separate entities, but Los's monologic imposition has created a kind of class division based on power. Later in the poem, this new division is then embodied as a female form and is called "Pity" by the Eternals but is later called "Enitharmon" (*U* 19.1, 19, E 78, 79). The separation between Los and Urizen produces yet another separation, thus developing a pattern in which division begets division, all divisions having their origin in Urizen's initial separation from Eternity. Once Enitharmon divides from Los, the two contraries, male and female, are opposed to each other. Across the space between them, Los tries to "reconcile" their contrariety by embracing Enitharmon, but she "refus'd / In perverse and cruel delight" (*U* 19.11–12, E 79). Her reason for fleeing, though, is to preserve her own individuality through the space that divides them, even though the individuality she preserves is the separation of Selfhood.

Los's attempted reconciliation creates another new division: a worm that grows into a serpent and becomes a male child. Much as the Eternals had named Urizen, so Los and Enitharmon impose the name "Orc" on the child, replicating the process of imposed differentiation. As Orc grows, he experiences the struggle of a new voice and a new

identity finding its own place in the discursive community. His vocalizations consist of “dolorous hissings” and “a grating cry” (*U* 19.27, 32, *E* 79). Orc’s experience is similar to that of the children in the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, whose voices are often stifled by those that already exist. In attempting to stifle Orc’s new voice, Los chains him to a mountain with the “Chain of Jealousy” (*U* 20.24, *E* 80), thus reenacting Los’s binding of Urizen. Also, much as Los binds Orc, the Eternal Prophet is again caught in the trap of monologic Selfhood, as his jealousy turns his prophetic powers into imposition:

But Los encircled Enitharmon
With fires of Prophecy
From the sight of Urizen & Orc.

And she bore an enormous race. (*U* 20.42–45, *E* 81)

Los, now removed from dialogue with Eternity, uses prophecy to isolate Enitharmon just as Urizen had attempted to bind Eternity to his law. Although prophecy is inspired when it is informed by dialogue, it becomes a force for imposition when Los uses it to encircle and isolate Enitharmon from Urizen and Orc. Discourse, even prophecy, can be used to impose if it is not dialogically inspired. Los’s imposition causes a multiplication of divisions as Enitharmon, separated from Orc, bears “an enormous race.”

Even though Orc is chained, his voice provides a small measure of hope for the desolation of *Urizen*:

The dead heard the voice of the child
And began to awaken from sleep
All things. heard the voice of the child
And began to awaken to life. (*U* 20.26–29, *E* 80)

As Orc lies chained to the mountain and attempts to establish himself as an individual in dialogue, he awakens “all things” from the death-like sleep of monologic self-closure. Orc is much like the chimney sweeper of *Experience* or the son of fire in the *Marriage*, who despite attempts to stifle their individual voices, manage, as we have noted, to confront monologic powers through dialogue. Indeed, Orc is so much like the son of fire that critics often refer to the latter as Orc, although he does not bear that name in the *Marriage*. Orc’s voice awakens Urizen who “sicken’d” to see his own creations, which are mere “portions of life; similitudes” (*U* 23.8, 4, *E* 81). Although little

good results from this awakening, Urizen at least realizes his efforts have resulted in fragmentation instead of unification.

This one brief awakening of dialogue, however, has little effect on the fragmented world of Urizen and Los. The Eternals, who “shudder’d when they saw, / Man begetting his likeness, / On his own divided image” (*U* 19.14–16, E 79), erect the Tent of Science to seal off Los and Urizen from Eternity. Now that division has ruptured the dialogic community, the Eternals seek to contain the division by imposing a new monologic discourse: the language of Science. No relief can be obtained from the rupture, however, because the discourse of Science has separated Eternity from the divided world of Los and Urizen. Their only chance to reestablish dialogue is through the work of the inspired poet.

DIALOGUE AND THE AUTHOR OF *URIZEN*

The vision of Selfhood and self-closed discourse in *Urizen* leaves little room for any alternative that might restore dialogue to a discursive community ruptured by monologism. The two instances in the poem that offer any hope—Los’s brief glance back to Eternity and the chained Orc’s voice awakening Urizen to the horrors of his creation—also seem to indicate the near impossibility of restoring dialogue. The poem even seems to implicate Blake’s own poetic production, as many critics have noted, since his books are also written in solitude and “formd of metals” through engraving on copper plates, suggesting that any utterance, even Blake’s own, is somehow Urizenic, since monologic self-closure has broken the dialogic chain of communication. Yet, if Blake’s project is to succeed, it must somehow overcome the self-closure and monopolization of meaning that Urizen exercises in his attempt to control the energetic flux of eternity. Blake’s poem must recognize the illusory nature of solitude and the limitations of any individual perspective by undermining the monopolizing authority of his speaker and bringing other voices into the production of discourse and interpretation.

In light of this problem, several critics have noticed that Blake seems to infuse *Urizen* with a multiplicity of possible meanings, rendering impossible any univocal meaning. Whereas Urizen’s attempt to monopolize discursive power only causes the continuous replication of self-closed discourse, Blake’s book would seem to have the reverse effect of generating a multitude of possible readings. According to Essick, Blake’s response to Urizenic discursive power takes the form of a “celebration of the figural as a disruption of, and hence a release

from, the taxonomic schema of meanings and grammatical categories. A proliferation of secondary motivation, from puns to extended metaphors, and the semantic excesses of polyvalent signifiers would seem to be the poet's best antidotes to the rigid matrices of Urizenic semiotics" (*William Blake* 156). According to Essick, moreover, the poet could exploit the polysemy inherent in figural language to break from the rigidity of Urizen's control over language and signification. Essick goes on to suggest, however, that such a strategy could also be seen as failed because the poet must still use the linguistic categories already established by Urizen: "The very act of transgressing categorical distinctions presupposes the existence of such categories as the primary ground of the figural" (*William Blake* 158). Still, even in Urizen's hands, language is always already polysemous, despite Urizen's attempt to impose limits on the polyvalent nature of language, to turn it into "a solid without fluctuation" (*U* 4.11, *E* 71). As Essick himself notes, "Like any other rule of law, grammar and the representational powers of arbitrary signs depend upon consensus backed by enforcement. . . . [Urizen] like [Samuel] Johnson, struggles against what he perceives to be semantic chaos" (*William Blake* 154). The problem is not necessarily using already existent linguistic constructs but using them in a limiting or imposing way that would curtail dialogue. As Aaron Fogel has noted, communication, conceived in terms of physical events, "involves the application of force between persons, which like force in work can be creative or annihilating" (6). Blake does not argue with Locke's claim that the signifier is arbitrarily assigned to the signified, as we have seen earlier, but he does quarrel with the limitations that Locke would impose on the sign because of its arbitrariness. Such limitations would allow some individuals to control the ways that language means and deny others the opportunity to participate in the creation of meaning.

Other critics have suggested that the polysemy in *Urizen* frees its readers from Urizen's linguistic tyranny by providing them with infinite possible meanings, thereby giving them a role in the creative process. As David Simpson has noted, Blake mediates his suspicion of linguistic structures by recognizing that even this flawed language is our only means of communication and deliberately infuses his discourse with a multiplicity of meaning, thus subverting the closure that Urizen imposes on the creation of meaning (14–15). Paul Mann suggests that the polysemy in *Urizen* disrupts the Urizenic tendency toward narrative and symbolic coherence and closure to reveal eternity to the reader. By sacrificing coherence and closure, Blake undermines Urizen's linguistic tyranny and opens the book to the reader (65). Even

the illustrations in *Urizen*, as W. J. T. Mitchell argues, imply that their “primary relationship is not with a larger world or landscape in which they exist but with us, their viewers. The ultimate effect of Blake’s symmetry, in other words, is to draw the reader into it, or what is the same thing, invite the reader to incorporate the pictures into himself” (*Blake’s Composite Art* 140). For Mitchell, the primary object of *Urizen* is to engage the reader so that he or she becomes part of the creation of the poem. All of these critics suggest that by foregrounding polysemy in *Urizen*, Blake shifts the site for the production of meaning and truth, at least partially, to the reader. Saree Makdisi explains the underlying political nature of the polysemy of *Urizen*: “Moreover, the logic of disciplinary authority and of unalterable commandment is in Blake’s critique also the logic of the sovereign text. The definite and unalterable—the reified—text lies in this sense at the heart of the network of disciplinary control. That Blake seeks to undermine the sovereignty of the text . . . can in this context no longer amount simply to a certain playfulness with words, but must also be recognized as a profoundly political activity” (69). Such a move to encourage readers to engage the poem in dialogic creative understanding also prevents the author from monopolizing meaning and truth and opens his text to dialogue. This embracement of dialogue indicates that the author has annihilated his Selfhood by opening his text to the voices of others. Even in a poem that chronicles the evils of monologic self-closure, self-annihilation succeeds to undermine the imposition of Selfhood.

The annihilation of authorial Selfhood begins in *Urizen* with the “Preludium.” Here, Blake opens his poem to include other voices in its production with an invocation:

Eternals I hear your call gladly,
Dictate swift winged words, & fear not
To unfold your dark visions of torment. (*U* 2.5–7, *E* 70)

In this invocation, the speaker addresses the Eternals and asks them to tell their story, their “dark visions of torment,” to him, explaining that he will hear their call “gladly” and that they should “fear not” to “dictate swift winged words.” In doing so, the speaker positions himself as a willing and trustworthy listener to the Eternals. As Timothy Clark explains, “The writer undergoes an experience of being somehow secondary to the sources of the text” (18). Instead of a speaker who claims to be the central authority for the “truth” of his discourse, this one shows himself as willing to have his discourse informed and even shaped by the discourse of others. The speaker stands in direct

contrast to Urizen who removes himself from dialogue and excludes other voices from the production of his discourse. Even the composition of the "Preludium" plate suggests a less monopolizing approach taken by the speaker. Unlike the arrangement of the text on every other plate in *Urizen*, the text on this plate is not divided into two columns and contains the greatest interpenetration of text and illustration of all the plates. Instead of being rigidly divided, the "Preludium" plate by contrast signifies a more interactive or dialogic approach. In writing on the problem of speech and writing in *Urizen*, Simpson notes that in writing, the effect of the author's discourse on his audience is deferred, since the act of writing takes place in private with the audience absent, making writing a nonreciprocal, thus "fallen," form of speech (16). The Eternals view Urizen's retirement into solitude as dangerous, not only because of the deferral inherent in writing, but also because Urizen writes without the benefit of dialogue. His laws are constructed in isolation, preventing others from responding. Urizen's creative process, devoid of the benefit of dialogue, is forbidden to the voices of others. Blake's "Preludium" opens up the creative process to other voices by addressing the Eternals, bringing their perspective into the poem. The invocation, with its built-in dynamic of address and response, eliminates the dangers of Urizenic solipsism that lead to self-closure and monologism by annihilating the controlling Selfhood of the authorial position, thereby creating a dialogically inspired discourse.

Of course, the inclusion of the Eternals as muse figures does not suggest that the Eternals offer any sort of infallible, transcendental perspective, as several critics make clear.⁵ Within the story, the Eternals do little to return Eternity to its former state after Urizen initiates his self-closed laws. Instead, they work to shield themselves from Urizen by sending Los to guard Urizen, and when Los fails, we have seen that they cover Urizen, Los, and the divided world with a Tent of Science. The Eternals' actions do little to restore dialogue once Urizen has ruptured it and can even be said, as we have further noted, to maintain the divisions Urizen creates. Yet, none of Blake's muses, not even the Saviour in *Jerusalem*, speaks from a perfect, infallible perspective, one that would literally dictate to the poet omniscient wisdom that could not be questioned. In order for the poem to be dialogically inspired, the speaker of the poem must have the opportunity to question his muse, to engage in the dynamic of response, and to add his own perspective to the production of the poem. Without a dialogic relationship between muse and speaker, the poem would be, in effect, a monologic, self-closed utterance issued by a central authority,

a situation that would thwart dialogue, much like Urizen's issuance of his laws for Eternity. Through the inspiration of dialogue, however, the poem becomes a collaboration between muse and speaker and, instead of being limited by a single perspective, here again carries within itself a multitude of perspectives, none of which dominates the others but all of which have a say in the poem's creation.

Along with the multiplicity of perspectives produced by the speaker-muse relationship, Blake also relinquishes his monopoly over the poem's meaning by foregrounding indeterminacy within his poem, an aspect of *Urizen* that has been well documented by critics. In foregrounding indeterminacy, Blake takes advantage of the arbitrary nature of the sign and frees it from the limitations that Locke would impose in it, undermining the monopolization of meaning from the authorial position, as we have noted. Locke claims that since the sign has only an arbitrary connection to its referent, an individual's linguistic creativity is actually limited. He writes that "common use, by a tacit Consent, appropriates certain Sounds to certain *Ideas* in all Languages, which so far limits the signification of that Sound, that unless a Man applies it to the same *Idea*, he does not speak properly" (408; bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 8). Convention, in Locke's formulation, binds an individual to use signs in only such a way that his or her listener expects, or else the speaker uses signs incorrectly. Indeed, both speaker and listener must conform to convention if communication is to take place in the Lockean formulation, because if the speaker speaks "properly," the listener must also interpret "properly." In *Urizen*, however, Blake explodes the Lockean limitation of arbitrary signs giving both speaker and listener the freedom to use signs creatively.

The explosion of the Lockean restrictions on the arbitrary sign occurs in the individualized ways in which Blake employs signs, ways that destabilize the connection between sign and referent. Blake would agree with Locke's claim that no individual can "arbitrarily appoint, what *Idea* any Sound should be the Sign of" (408; bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 8), yet Blake's appointment of signs often invites recipients to participate in the establishment of a referent.⁶ The most obvious case is the name "Urizen," which as Hilton has clearly shown, carries with it several connotations involving otherness, the limits of reason, and self-contemplation, ironically undermining with his very name the control over language that Urizen seeks (*Literal Imagination* 254–55). The name for Urizen's contrary, the "Eternals," also carries several connotations in the poem, especially since the word "eternal" is frequently used as an adjective as well. "Eternal" is the name for a member of the group from which Urizen breaks, but it also means,

of course, “forever.” The difficulty the word “eternal” creates can be seen in the example in which the speaker refers to “Urizen” as “his eternal name”:

The eternal Prophet howl'd
Beating still on his rivets of iron
Pouring sodor of iron; dividing
The horrible night into watches.

And Urizen (so his eternal name)
His prolific delight obscurd more & more
In dark secrecy hiding in surgeing
Sulphureous fluid his phantasies. (*U* 10.7–14, E 75)

Here, Los, acting for the Eternals, fashions rivets into a chain to bind Urizen as he attempts to maintain his separation “in dark secrecy hiding.” This scene, with its emphasis on the eternality of Urizen’s name, recalls the beginning of the poem when the Eternals recognize a rupture in the fabric of their discursive community. They then name that separation when “Some said / ‘It is Urizen,’” suggesting, as we have seen, that the Eternals are attempting to restore the separation to the dialogic fold by naming it (*U* 3.5–6, E 70). Both naming Urizen and sending Los to confine him could also be seen as imposition, since the separation does not have any opportunity to name itself. In this situation, Urizen’s “eternal name” is the one given to him by the Eternals. Yet, if the “eternal name” refers to the name he has had “forever,” then the Eternals merely identify Urizen as the perpetrator of the rupture with the name he has had all along. In this formulation, the Eternals can in no way be seen as imposing a name on Urizen, but could only be seen as interpreting and identifying a problem in their community through language, thus making the loss of Urizen a part of their dialogue. The pun on “eternal,” like the pun on “Urizen” and other destabilizing signs in the poem, complicates the reading of the poem, yet at the same time allows the reader to participate in the creation of the poem through the exploitation of the arbitrary nature of the sign.

Along with the invocation and the destabilizing signs, Blake also uses his own book production process to annihilate the monopoly of authorial Selfhood and to provoke the reader’s participation in the creation of meaning. Blake’s manipulation of the book production process affects the reception of *Urizen* more than any other of Blake’s illuminated books precisely because *Urizen* identifies book

production as a central aspect in the proliferation of self-closed discourse. Whereas Urizen, through his isolation, forbids others to participate in the creation of his book of laws, Blake's book production process allows his readers to participate in the creation of *Urizen*. In order to undercut the kind of monopoly on interpretation that Urizen's book holds, Blake has, as we have noted, produced eight different known versions of *Urizen*, each of which constitutes a separate retelling of the Urizen story. Not only are the full-page illustrations rearranged in each copy, as critics have often noted, but the text is also significantly altered from copy to copy. Until recently, critics have considered the textual problems in *Urizen* as impediments in their search for a definitive, synoptic edition of the poem, yet as Jerome McGann notes, no editor has been "willing to pursue their quest for narrative consistency far enough so as to remove one or another of the duplicate chapters 4. Furthermore, all later editions enshrine the problem of this unstable text in that curious title—so difficult to read aloud—with the bracketed word: *The [First] Book of Urizen*. . . . Thus a residue of the text's 'extraordinary inconsistency' always remains a dramatic presence in our received scholarly editions" ("The Idea" 308). No matter how much scholars attempt to blend the eight *Urizens* into one synoptic edition, they are always left with unresolved textual problems that seem to attest to the irresolvability that Blake may have, in fact, built into his "copies." In his remarkable study of Blake's book production process, Joseph Viscomi argues that Blake printed a number of impressions from each of the twenty-eight plates of *Urizen* and then collated them in various arrangements and orders. As Viscomi explains, "*Urizen*-as-produced (printed, collated, sold) differed from *Urizen*-as-written/etched. While the structural differences do not represent different moments in *Urizen*'s initial composition, they do make reading each copy of *Urizen* a unique experience, in ways not possible with the early copies of *Thel*, *America*, and *Visions [of the Daughters of Albion]*" (Blake 286). McGann suggests that this situation amounts to a Blakean critique of traditional biblical scholarship: "The textual anomalies are . . . part of a deliberate effort to critique the received Bible and its traditional exegetes. . . . To read *The Book of Urizen* is to discover a Bible one had never known before; it is to learn to read the traditional Bible in an entirely new way" ("The Idea" 323–24). According to McGann, the work of Alexander Geddes showed Blake that many versions of the Bible existed, and their differences and redundancies rendered any sort of stable or definitive text impossible, thus opening for the reader new avenues for biblical interpretation ("The Idea" 323). The so-called textual problems,

then, are devices that Blake employs to critique the construction of “standardized” biblical texts and to radicalize the experience of reading the Bible.

But *Urizen* can be seen not only as a critique of the “standard” presentation of the Bible (the Book, with a capital “B”) but also as a critique of the potential for authorial power that print technology can foster through its ability to mass produce exact copies of a text. As Kernan explains, the printed word began to take on increased authority, since records and official documents were being produced and stored by mechanically reproduced printing, creating “a generally accepted view that what is printed is true, or at least truer than any other kind of record” (49). As official discourse adopted print as its medium, the medium itself began to take on the authority of truth. The ability of print to carry the weight of greater authority lay in its ability to finalize a text:

Print . . . fixed the literary text, by giving it an objective and unchanging reality in its own right. In earlier oral cultures there could be no such thing as an exact text, since the particular form something took at any given moment always depended . . . on performance. Even in a manuscript culture a work was seldom or never reproduced exactly the same way twice running, and so remained always a process, never becoming a completed, static object. But in a print culture, type makes it possible for the work to exist as a fixed object, infinitely and accurately reproducible, controlling, even “being” as it were, its own form independent of perception or accidents. (Kernan 51–52)

By producing a multitude of exact copies of a text, print technology imposes the same text, the same utterance, on every reader, thereby fixing the author’s point of view as an organizing force controlling the reader’s perception. Since an oral performance or even a manuscript changes with each new retelling or copy, these unfinalizable reproductions blur any concept of a static authorial position. The variations in each performance place more emphasis on the performer than on the original author, a situation that, as Kernan notes, had fostered a tradition of literary anonymity in Europe from the postclassical period into the Renaissance (71). With the gradual development of print, however, the finalization of the text eliminates the performance aspect and establishes the author as the single voice producing the text. The authority that print seems to convey gives the authorial position the power to monologically affirm the “truth” of its utterance and to claim authenticity for its point of view, denying readers an opportunity to

respond to the author. Instead of a collaboration of many individuals adding infinite variety and opportunity for interpretation with each performance of a work, a single author and a finalized text limits both participation in the text's production and interpretation in its reception. As a purveyor of truth instead of one of many performers, the author can be seen as speaking from a position of authority that can preempt response. By removing inconsistencies from textual production, print technology finalizes the literary text, enabling it to establish itself as a fixed object independent of the accidents that give oral or manuscript texts variety and also of the individual "perception" of readers. Even in practical terms, the cost of book production alone, a very labor intensive process that used taxed paper that nearly doubled production costs (Gaull 12), made buying a book an intimidating prospect that gave readers the impression, according to Alan D. Boehm, that books contained "more serious or more valuable subjects and for more exclusive readers" (470). As Marlon B. Ross adds, "The printed text acquires itself the imprimatur of authority, not only in that it can carry the royal stamp or the stamp of the Stationer's company, but more importantly because print, even without these legal imprints, becomes the cause of authority. Once printed, the text possesses authority, and the writer, however lacking in knowledge or experience, becomes an author who possesses the authority imprinted in the text, whose words must be attended to because someone saw fit to print them" (242–43). The materiality of the printed book, in both its mass produced exactitude and its expense, gave the author of the printed work an authority that had not previously been possible.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the authoritative connotations of books began to erode, giving way to more democratic and liberating connotations. In his discussion of this shift in the American colonies, Michael Warner writes, "The most salient difference between the traditional culture of print and the republican one is a set of assumptions developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. . . . The reader now also incorporates *into the meaning of the printed object* an awareness of the potentially limitless others who may also be reading. For that reason, it becomes possible to imagine oneself, in the act of reading, becoming part of the arena of the national people that cannot be realized except through such mediating imaginings" (xiii). Instead of finding oneself "inscribed in the imperial periphery by a print discourse that everywhere recorded its emanation from distant parts," a reader, as part of a broad reading public, can begin to see print as an element of "local and everyday

phenomena" (Warner 17). This localization levels class barriers and undermines the authority of the fixed external position of the author. Rather than a vehicle for dictating sacred codes, mass-produced printed works begin to carry the connotation that a book could unite writers and readers in a collective forum for participatory discourse. These changes in the connotations of the book were taking place in England, as well, leading Wordsworth and Coleridge, for example, to make publishing and typesetting decisions that ran counter to traditional norms. As Boehm notes, small, cheaply produced books were beginning to reach broader audiences of all classes, and the production of the *Lyrical Ballads* participated in this evolution: "In *Lyrical Ballads*, the reader of 1798 could discern a book that scrupulously rejected costly engravings, typefaces, and exacting presswork, that conscientiously refused to distinguish the public in terms of an affluent, discriminating minority. To Wordsworth's and Coleridge's way of thinking, then, *Lyrical Ballads*' unadorned typography projected a liberal and democratic vision of the English reading public" (469). In producing the *Lyrical Ballads* without the costly trappings of traditional book production, Wordsworth and Coleridge were able to address and communicate with a broad audience, enabling otherwise excluded members of the reading public to participate in the book's reception. Along with Wordsworth and Coleridge, many writers of the Romantic period saw in the elements of book production a potential for undermining the authorial power of traditional print culture and for enabling greater reader participation in the social exchange of printed discourse.

Yet the traditional print culture notions of authorial power refused to wane, because other writers saw in the cheap, mass-produced book even greater potential for authorial power since it could convey the author's single voice to so many more readers. On the one hand, cheaply printed books were being used in the late eighteenth century for radical political purposes, such as the incendiary second part of Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* produced in a six-penny version in 1793 for a lower class audience. On the other hand, they were also being used in an attempt to control the lower classes, through, for example, the government-subsidized propaganda by Arthur Young and William Paley and Hannah More's Cheap Repository Tracts (Gaull 47–48). While cheap, mass produced books were newly being used to democratize or incite a mass audience, they were also being used to repress such a reading public. Although Blake did not mass-produce his work or reach a mass audience in his day, he, nevertheless, responds to this cultural conflict by presenting in *Urizen* both

alternative potentialities of print technology. As Makdisi argues, "For if the illuminated books can be seen to break down the opposition between original and copy by subverting the emergent industrial logic of production as reproduction, . . . then we can see the extent to which Blake's work poses a challenge not only to the logic of producing as copying, but to the much broader set of cultural, economic, political, and religious processes and concepts associated with it" (197). While the story of *Urizen* describes the potential for print to suppress an audience by establishing an Urizenic authorial position to control the creation of meaning, Blake's own method of book production disrupts this authorial power by undermining the ways that the print medium aids in the establishment of the Urizenic authorial position. While *Urizen* uses the static nature of the book to fix and finalize Eternity, Blake's book production process removes the stasis and fixity of the book by eliminating exact duplication from the mechanical reproduction of a text, thereby disrupting the authorial power that exact duplication fosters.

As an engraver associated with the book production industry, Blake would have been acutely aware of the implications that print technology had for the public and the culture. His training as an artist-craftsman, as Stephen Prickett has noted, readied him for an occupation that was already in a precarious and declining position, since by the 1790s, it was threatened by newer, faster, and cheaper technologies of graphic reproduction, making the skills of the individual craftsman obsolete. This circumstance was exacerbated for Blake by the fact that the man to whom he was apprenticed, James Basire, was conspicuously old-fashioned in both his style and methods (61). Having to compete at a disadvantage with these technological advances probably caused Blake to view new mechanical book production methods with disdain. Blake probably viewed the very terminology of the printing press with a degree of irony, as Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson have discussed. In the vocabulary of the type foundry, each piece of type was called a "body," and the raised letter on the body was called a "face." A notch at the other end of the body, called a "foot," locked the body, along with hundreds of other bodies, in the "justified lines" of a page within a "frame," and the frame was then placed on the press stone within a "coffin." These terms evoke the kind of stern, even deadening, regimentation that was required to produce a fixed text (81–82). Also, Essick has noted that the cross-hatchings of intaglio line engraving and etching form a kind of web or net to reduce objects to images and while efficient may have been seen by Blake as restrictive ("Blake and the Traditions" 62). These circumstances also intimate

what Blake probably saw as the subordination of many individuals, in both the text's production and its reception, to the service of one author. Instead of individual performances recreating the text anew, a multitude of individuals here again works to produce thousands of exact copies of a single book mechanically, a single performance by one author and the only performance for thousands of readers to witness. The frame of the type foundry fixes an author's voice, giving it a potential authority that only print technology could and, at the same time, severely limiting the creativity of those individuals involved in the production process as well as that of the readers.

Blake's own production process, however, responds to this cultural shift and returns the performance aspect to mechanically reproduced texts through the eight different tellings of the Urizen story that the eight different "copies" represent. In his comments about the necessity of individuality in a work of art, Blake seems to make a parallel suggestion that each version of his books must also be produced as an individual work. Blake writes in his *Public Address*, "There is not because there cannot be any difference of Effect in the Pictures of Rubens & Rembrandt when you have seen one of their Pictures you have seen All. . . . their Effects are in Every Picture the same Mine are in Every Picture different" (E 579). To follow the course of Rubens or Rembrandt, according to Blake, is to "<turn> that which is Soul & Life into a Mill or Machine." Furthermore, "a Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art it is Destructive of Humanity & of Art" (E 575). The exact duplication of mechanical reproduction, it would seem, would deprive Blake's books, his works of art, of their humanity. As Stephen Leo Carr notes, "Blake's printmaking process . . . is . . . a form of reproduction that breaks free from simple repetition. The initial invention is always open to an execution that can substantively alter its configurations, to a new articulation that may depart in unpredictable ways from other versions" (196). As Blake executes each new version of *Urizen*, he, thereby, turns each copy of the book into an individual performance, producing eight different, original copies under a similar, though not identical, title and undermining the cultural trends that mass-produced book production fostered into the eighteenth century. Blake's book production process reintroduces performance into the experience of reading mechanically reproduced printed matter by making each "copy" of his book a separate telling of the Urizen story. The variations in each retelling reestablish the reader's position as necessary for the creation of meaning in print culture.

Much of the critical speculation has focused mainly on the interpretive possibilities provided by the changing positions of the illustrations.⁷

In commenting on the order of the illustrations in his textual notes to the poem, Erdman hypothesizes that Blake moves the full-page illustrations further away from their simplest textual referents to develop a more sophisticated pictorial commentary on the poem. The picture of Urizen in chains (plate 22 in the standard order), for example, is appropriate to the text on plates 8–13 where Los chains Urizen.⁸ This plate follows plate 13 in copy C and precedes it in B. In A, however, the same illustration appears right after the title page and the “Preludium,” foreshadowing the later events of the poem that are the result of Urizen’s books (E 804). As Easson and Easson have noted, many of the designs themselves are altered from copy to copy, as well. In copy G, the illustration of Los in fire shows him with his eyes open and anguished and his mouth open as if howling, but in copy B, Los’s eyes are narrowed and tearful and his mouth is turned downward into a frown (plate 16), suggesting an association with Urizen in chains whose eyes are closed and mouth frowning (plate 22). This association is further enhanced in copy A, since Los is pictured with a beard, suggesting that Los has become even more like Urizen (89–90). About these and the many other pictorial variations, John B. Pierce argues, “The experiments in plate ordering introduce an architectural structuring of pictures that often diverts attention from the teleology of verbal narrative while other copies reinforce the verbal narrative at the expense of the symmetries of visual pattern. The surviving copies seem to act like a series of experiments in verbal and visual narrative, experiments that often compromise continuities leading to aesthetic closure and threaten the coherence of the writing space that constitutes the book of *Urizen*” (93). As the illustrations appear in different positions with various alterations, they evoke different associations with the text and contribute to the individualized nature of each copy.

More striking than rearrangements of the illustrations, however, are the variations in the arrangement of text plates, an aspect of the poem that has not been adequately explored. Although the plates containing text are often considered as keeping “the same *relative* order in every copy,” as W. J. T. Mitchell has suggested (*Blake’s Composite Art* 137; emphasis added), each variation in text plate arrangement dramatically shifts the emphasis from one element of the Urizen story to others, yet none of the textual variations greatly disrupts the text’s syntactical continuity. These variations do sometimes confuse the chapter and verse numbering, but every copy has some disruption in the chapter and verse number sequence (Easson and Easson 42). The most obvious variation involves the presence or absence of plate 4 in any particular copy’s arrangement of plates.⁹ Plate 4, which appears

only in copies A, B, and C, contains Urizen's famous speech to the Eternals and the presentation of his book of laws. At the end of plate 3, the scene shifts with the sound of a trumpet, and as if assembling for Urizen's address,

myriads of Eternity,
Muster around the bleak desarts. (*U* 3.44–4.1, *E* 71)

Urizen then makes his pronouncements, and as he unclasps his books to the rage of the Eternals, he unleashes the seven deadly sins to enforce his laws and thwart any response to them:

And all the seven deadly sins of the soul
In living creations appear'd
In flames of eternal fury. (*U* 4.49–5.2, *E* 72)¹⁰

The inclusion of plate 4 places Urizen's book of law as the main cause for the rupture in Eternity and deemphasizes his separation as only a prerequisite for the creation of his book. In copies A, B, and C, Urizen's withdrawal from the community of the Eternals causes some apprehension, but the imposition of his law in plate 4 ignites the Eternals' rage and creates the unbridgeable gulf between the world Urizen has created for himself and the rest of Eternity.

Without plate 4, however, the emphasis shifts away from Urizen's laws to his separation and his silence as the cause for the rupture in Eternity. Instead of "All seven deadly sins of the soul / In living creations" appearing (*U* 4.49–5.1, *E* 72), the "myriads of Eternity" replace the seven deadly sins as the subject of the sentence that, with plate 4 removed, begins on plate 3 and ends on plate 5. As "the sound of a trumpet" announces the appearance of "Urizen, so nam'd / That solitary one in Immensity" (*U* 3.40, 42–43, *E* 71),

myriads of Eternity,
.....
In living creations appear'd
In flames of eternal fury. (*U* 3.44–5.2, plate 4 omitted, *E* 71, 72)

With the removal of plate 4, the scene changes from the myriads of Eternity mustering "around the bleak desarts" to hear Urizen speak to the myriads reacting fiercely to his intractable separation (*U* 4.1, *E* 71). In this sequence, the Eternals respond with rage not to Urizen's discourse but to his absence from Eternity. Nowhere else but on plate

4 does Urizen speak, and the only reference to his law appears on plate 23, where "he saw / That no flesh nor spirit could keep / His iron laws one moment" (*U* 23.24–26, E 81). Also, the seven deadly sins appear only on plate 4, so obviously they could not factor in the enforcement of Urizen's law. The only references to Urizen's book occur pictorially in the title page and plate 5, and without the text of plate 4 to indicate a direct connection to Urizen's book, the poem seems to emphasize not Urizen's iron law but his separation and silence as the main cause for the rupture within Eternity and the Eternals' failure to stop it. The inclusion or exclusion of plate 4, therefore, drastically alters the performance that any individual copy represents in the telling of the Urizen story and radically alters the poem's reception from copy to copy.

The altering of the Urizen story continues in copies C and J with the manipulations of text plates 7 and 8. In copy C, both plates are omitted, and in copy J, plate 7 remains but plate 8 is omitted. Rather than the well-known two chapters IV, both of these copies contain only a single chapter IV, since plate 8 contains the first chapter IV in the standard plate order and the other chapter IV begins on plate 10.¹¹ In both C and J, furthermore, these text plate omissions change Los's role in the Eternals' reaction against Urizen. In the standard ordering of the plates, a reader sees that as plate 5 ends, the violent upheaval in Eternity has begun with the Eternals sending fire over Urizen's world and Urizen working to keep the fires at bay. Los is sent to keep watch for the Eternals and to confine Urizen. In plate 6, Los is "howling around the dark Demon: / And cursing his lot," suggesting that Los is reluctant to perform his assignment (*U* 6.2–3, E 73). Then, Urizen is rent from Los's side, making permanent Urizen's separation from Eternity, and as Urizen lays in "a stony sleep," the Eternals declare that this sleep is the sleep of death (*U* 6.7, E 74). Plate 7 describes Los's astonishment at the separation, and plate 8 shows Los's reaction as he forms "nets and gins" to bind "the changes of Urizen" "with rivets of iron and brass" (*U* 8.7, 12, 11, E 74). In plate 10, Los continues to labor unceasingly, forging chains to bind Urizen and to divide "the horrible night into watches" (*U* 10.10, E 75). Plates 7 and 8, then, provide a motivation for Los's intense, Urizenic work in that his fear over the separation of himself and Urizen sets him to confining Urizen. Without 7 and 8 in copy C, however, Los appears more as a reluctant servant or agent of the Eternals sent to confine Urizen as ordered and does not seem to operate out of fear. He simply curses his lot and labors to forge chains to confine Urizen. The removal of 7 and 8, then, places the responsibility of binding Urizen

on the Eternals, since they assign a reluctant Los to perform this task. In copy J, however, Los's role in the binding of Urizen seems more active, because the inclusion of plate 7 shows Los agonizing over the separation with Urizen "Till Los rouz'd his fires, affrighted / At the formless unmeasurable death" (*U* 7.8–9, E 74). Then on plate 10, Los is seen chaining Urizen, which rousing his fires would help him accomplish. Although Los's role in binding Urizen is not quite as emphatically portrayed in copy J as it is in other versions that include both plates 7 and 8, the text on plate 7 shows Los to be more active in the binding of Urizen than he is in copy C without either plates 7 or 8. With the manipulations of plates 7 and 8, copies C and J give completely different versions of the events surrounding Los's binding of Urizen, changing the reader's perception of Los and his role in the Eternals' backlash against Urizen. Even though Blake uses a process of mechanical reproduction to produce the books of *Urizen*, he continues to undermine the authorial position that print technology fosters in copies C and J by creating alternative versions of Los's responsibility in the binding of Urizen.

The textual variants continue in copies B and F with the reversal of text plates 8 and 10, altering the reader's perception by showing Los's actions as much more clearly Urizenic.¹² In the standard configuration, Los becomes frightened because Urizen has split from Los's side on plates 6 and 7, and he begins on plate 8 to forge chains and fetters that confine Urizen in a body, as we have seen. This process, which runs continuously from 10 through 13 in other copies, is interrupted after plate 10 in B and F by plate 8, which in this reordering, serves to reemphasize Los's fright as it parenthetically explains that these fetters are the "nets and gins" associated with Los's backlash against Urizen. The reversal of 8 and 10 reinforces Los's fear and his responsibility for the binding of Urizen because the reader learns of Los's role twice, on plate 7 and again on plate 8 as it follows 10. With this reversal, the reader still receives the impression in plate 7 that Los binds Urizen out of fear, but this impression is doubled when 8 follows 10 instead of 7. In copies B and F, and possibly E (see note 12), the arrangement of text plates seems to implicate Los more strongly as an agent against Urizen, creating a new possibility for interpretation.

A final reordering of the text occurs in copy A where plate 15 is removed from the standard order and placed after plate 18. Although Erdman attributes this arrangement to a binder's error (E 805), the continuity of the text is in no way compromised and, in fact, supports the change easily. In plate 13, Los ceases his labors when he realizes that he, too, has been "cut off from life and light," and he

begins to pity Urizen (*U* 13.42, *E* 77). His pity creates a new division that, at end of 13, is characterized as “a round globe of blood / Trembling upon the Void” (*U* 13.58–59, *E* 77). When 15 follows 13 in the standard order, the division of the globe of blood from Los appears directly related to Los’s division from Urizen: “Thus the Eternal Prophet was divided / Before the death-image of Urizen” (*U* 15.1–2, *E* 78). Plate 15 ends with a description of how the Eternals view Los and the divided world: “And now seen, now obscur’d, to the eyes / Of Eternals, the visions remote / Of the dark separation appear’d. / As glasses discover Worlds” (*U* 15.6–9, *E* 78). Not until the next plate of text, plate 18, does the reader learn that this dividing globe of blood forms Enitharmon, the first female. The reader learns only after the division takes place in front of Urizen that it is not a separation between Los and Urizen but a separation that divides Los from himself. Blake strongly emphasizes the presence of Urizen as this division occurs and only later clarifies the result of the division. In the 13, 18, 15 arrangement in A, however, the reader first sees the division of Los and Enitharmon, followed by the fact that this division occurs in front of Urizen’s death-image, a fact that has less to do with the division of Los and Enitharmon than it does in the 13, 15, 18 arrangement in the other copies. In the arrangement in copy A, Blake stresses the division of Los and the first female and only later notes that it takes place before Urizen. By reversing 15 and 18 in copy A, Blake creates a new twist that characterizes the creation of the first female as a function of Los’s own feelings of pity and not of any direct Urizenic influence. Instead of the division of Los having a specific connection to the separation of Urizen, copy A emphasizes the problem of the divisions that can take place within the individual independent of others’ influence. As with the other shifts in the ordering of text plates, the reversal of plates 15 and 18 creates a variation in the Urizen story that makes the reading of the mechanically reproduced text a unique experience and undermines the author’s control over the creation of meaning.

With all of these textual variations, Blake annihilates authorial Selfhood. Instead of a multitude of exact copies univocally asserting the author’s “truth,” Blake produces a number of different “copies” that tell a new variation of the story of Selfhood. This story contains many elements of his earlier work, including the use of discursive power to monopolize interpretation and the monologic backlash that often follows an initial threat to dialogue. Yet in Blake’s quest to liberate the dialogic imagination, he must avoid such backlashes in his own work, and he does so by opening his texts to the voices of others. In *Urizen*,

he makes use of the invocation to the Eternals, which rhetorically positions the poem not as the author's invention but as informed by the discourse of others as recorded by the poet. He also makes use of the arbitrary sign to destabilize the connection between sign and referent, providing readers with sites for creative interpretation. Finally, Blake uses his own book production process to undo the restraints of mechanical reproduction by creating a new version of *Urizen* with each copy. With eight versions of the same story, no copy contains the complete, "correct" version of the Urizen story, but each contributes a new approach to it, as eight different voices describing their own understanding of an event. Instead of a single author telling a single story through exact copies, Blake employs a multitude of perspectives and encourages his readers to add theirs to the construction of *Urizen*. In telling the story of the original authorial Selfhood, Blake also tells the story of its annihilation.

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CHAPTER 4



MILTON

THE ANNIHILATION OF AUTHORIAL SELFHOOD

If *Urizen* develops the abuses that authorial power can exert over texts and audiences and the problems that arises from those abuses, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, *Milton* considers the possibility of avoiding and undoing those abuses. As the preface to *Milton* clearly indicates, Blake is deeply concerned with the creative process and whether inspiration can be restored with the restructuring of communication: “The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero. which all Men ought to condemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible. but when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce; all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & Consciously & professedly Inspired Men, will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration” (*M* 1, E 95). The preface considers two modes of creativity, one associated with memory and the other with inspiration. Memory, as a source of creativity, is, according to Blake, a negative element associated with classical models, theft, and perversion that has gained prominence over inspiration. Blake elaborates on this idea in other writings, indicating the importance it has in his thinking. In a passage on the drawings of Thomas Williams Malkin, for example, Blake writes, “A plagiarist . . . works only from memory,” and in *A Vision of The Last Judgment*, he argues that while “Fable or Allegory is Formd by the Daughters of Memory,” “Imagination is Surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration” and produces an “Eternal Vision . . . of All that Exists” (E 693; *VLJ*, E 554). Memory, then, produces artificial copies and exact duplicates, which add nothing new to the understanding of reality and may very well reinforce old errors

and falsehoods. Inspiration, however, produces a new and unique representation of reality, one that offers a fresh perspective that both acknowledges and adds to previous interpretations and informs future understanding. While the preface looks forward to a new age of inspiration, it also directs the reader's attention to this issue as he or she moves forward into the poem.

What the poem sets out to address, as several critics have noticed, is an ideological stratification in the production of discourse that establishes hierarchies and thwarts the exchange of ideas across these hierarchies. James Rieger has noticed four levels of discourse in *Milton*, with the sublime vision of the Bard's song as the highest level and the discourse of the "False Tongue," or self-closed discourse, as the lowest. According to Rieger, the four levels of discourse create problems for communication within the poem because the utterance of a higher level is only partially intelligible to those below (277). The problem, then, is not that hierarchies within a discursive community cause misunderstanding but that they establish the authority for truth. Carrying this point further, Andrew Cooper has noted that no one level in *Milton* can univocally embody truth in its discourse, and the poem focuses on the conflicts between levels ("Blake's Escape" 90–91). More recently, other critics have noted that this hierarchical structuring is the result of a complicity with institutional discourses that regulate subjectivity and morality. David G. Riede, for example, explains that *Milton* argues against a writer's claiming too much authority, since it "will result in reducing that author to a 'church,' a mere codifier of repressive moral laws" (51). Angela Esterhammer shows how the poem exposes Milton's God as participating in a "sociopolitical form of utterance, by having his deity engage in arbitrary naming and issue oppressive speech acts" (*Creating States* 153). Kevin D. Hutchings sees a connection with the historical Milton's participation in a "regicidal politics which resulted not in the ushering in of freedom but in the establishment of a new and rigid orthodoxy" (276). The problem that all these critics address, taken together, is that the dialogic process of representing different versions of truth is thwarted when one level of the hierarchy assumes a monopoly on truth and excludes the perspectives of other levels.

This dialogic process is restored, the poem argues, when this monopoly over truth is relinquished and the excluded voices are returned to their places in the discursive community, as several critics have suggested. For example, Riede notes, "Blake attempts to replace the univocal Miltonic sublime with a kind of dialogic sublime of spiritual strife in which *vision* is always combative *revision*" (51).

John Pierce adds, "In *Milton*, Eternity is rendered in the form of verbal exchange between human beings rather than in a transcendent setting, removing the tendency to think of it in terms of the abstract categories of extended time and expanded space" (138). Julia Wright concludes that the multiple perspectives within the poem each produce separate retellings of the single event narrated in the story: "Each iteration, or citation, operates within a different context, creating not a rigid series to be summed or divided, but a dynamic of interrelationships" (52–53). Indeed, the process of confounding the rigid hierarchical structuring in the poem begins when the Bard's song inspires Milton to annihilate his Selfhood and to reestablish his relationship with his emanation. When Milton hears the Bard's song, he realizes the imposition that his own discourse had perpetrated when he alone asserted Eternal Providence and justified the ways of God to men, so he chooses to annihilate his Selfhood by relinquishing his monologic authorial position and allowing other voices to participate in the creative process. Yet, self-annihilation in *Milton* is not without risk and comes only after great difficulty. As Milton enters self-annihilation, he and the other Sons of Albion view his change as going to "Eternal Death." Since self-annihilation involves such a radical interchange between addresser and addressee to allow for the transcendence of the finite boundaries of Selfhood through dialogue, it implies a dissolution of identity that those in Selfhood see as death or worse. According to Timothy Clark, "Inspiration may bear a peculiar transitivity, one that confounds distinctions between self and other. . . . Agency is uncertain and mobile—we also speak of an inspired text, without reference necessarily to an author" (3). As Milton undergoes self-annihilation, he fears that his identity will be lost. Furthermore, since self-closed discourse coerces its listeners into accepting its "truths" unchallenged, self-annihilation could lead one to find his or her discourse infiltrated by another's self-closed discourse, especially when, as Esterhammer states, such discourse "derives its power from the authority of an institution or from a set of conventions accepted by a societal group" (*Creating States* 124). The individual would then simply repeat another's monologic utterance, from memory as Blake would say, instead of responding to it imaginatively or dialogically. Also speakers could feign dialogic inspiration in order to invest their utterances with authority and monopolize truth. Riede discusses this problem when he writes, "In the spiritual warfare of imagination, no one voice should, presumably, be privileged as authoritative, or the spiritual conflict would end, superseded by a 'body' of dogma. Yet Blake clearly wants to

establish an authoritative, prophetic voice, wants to describe a timeless vision. He wants to establish a voice that *is* the 'breath of the Almighty,' though he knows that the result would be yet another authoritative patriarchal church" (71). Although Riede sees such "authoritative univocity" as inevitable (51), the final confrontation between Satan and Milton may indicate otherwise, however tentatively and provisionally, establishing a voice that is not "the breath of the Almighty," but established on "the words of man to man" (*M* 30.18, E 129).

Not only does the title character of *Milton* undergo self-annihilation, but so does the author of the poem, as represented by the poem's speaker. In the invocation to the poem, the speaker exhibits a skeptical, ambivalent stance toward his muses, the Daughters of Beulah, who convey the story to the speaker. Even though the speaker requests that the Daughters of Beulah help him with the composition of the story of *Milton*, thereby establishing the recognition of other voices that is necessary for dialogic inspiration, he fears that as he relinquishes his monopoly over his discourse, he will lose his place in the poem's creation and allow his voice to be subsumed by the Daughters. As the poem progresses, however, the speaker's self-annihilation becomes complete as Los and the speaker merge into one body and travel together to aid in Milton's self-annihilation. The poem, then, depicts two simultaneous annihilations of authorial Selfhoods: those of Milton, the author in the poem, and the speaker, the author of *Milton*.

THE BARD'S SONG: SELFHOOD AND SELF-ANNIHILATION

According to the poem, Milton lives in a state of Selfhood prior to his self-annihilation, and in this state, he exhibits the kind of linguistic coercion and denial of others' responses that is characteristic of Selfhood:

He saw the Cruelties of Ulro, and he wrote them down
In iron tablets: and his Wives & Daughters names were these
Rahab and Tirzah, & Milcah & Malah & Noah & Hoglah.
They sat rangd round him as the rocks of Horeb round the land
Of Canaan: and they wrote in thunder smoke and fire
His dictate; and his body was the Rock Sinai; that body,
Which was on earth born to corruption: & the six Females
Are Hor & Peor & Bashan & Abarim & Lebanon & Hermon
Seven rocky masses terrible in the Desarts of Midian. (*M* 17.9–17, E 110)

Milton issues "his dictate" that his three wives and his three daughters, his "Sixfold Emanation" (*M* 2.19, E 96), transcribe, but it seems they may not question his dictate. Significantly, they do not speak prior to Milton's self-annihilation and only do so afterward under a collective name for Milton's sixfold emanation: "Ololon." Nor do the wives and daughters receive any inspiration from Milton's "dictate," since Milton's attention is focused on the "Cruelties of Ulro," the finalized material world. As Pierce explains, "Blake critiques not just patriarchy but ontologically shared oppression showing that writing from the physical body enslaves and is enslaving" (135). Milton's writings of Ulro are also associated with finalizing, self-closed discourse—discourse devoid of dialogic inspiration—in that they are written in "iron tablets" and are reminiscent of Urizen's "books formd of metals" (*U* 4.24, E 72). This self-closure cements their existences into "seven rocky masses terrible." In terms of receiving a dictate, Milton's wives and daughters stand in sharp contrast to Blake's inspiration-receiving speakers who enter a dialogic relationship with a muse. Although Blake's speakers of *Urizen*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* ask their muses to dictate to them, they always have the opportunity to question and respond to their muses and to participate in the creative process of the poem. As a result of Milton's self-closed discourse, however, the wives and daughters have no such participatory role except for that of copyists recording and repeating Milton's impositions. Writing in "thunder smoke and fire," they demonstrate the anger of Rintrah and the desire to overturn Milton's oppressive dominance, but they have neither the power nor opportunity to respond dialogically, thus remaining "scatter'd thro' the deep / In torment" (*M* 2.19–20, E 96).

In order for Milton to annihilate his Selfhood and free his emanation from his own self-closed discourse, he must acknowledge the equal right of others to voice their own perspectives and to engage others' discourses dialogically. In other words, Milton must become inspired. Milton's inspiration occurs when a Bard addresses the Sons of Albion and sings about the restrictive nature of self-closed discourse. According to the Bard's song, which begins with an abbreviated version of *The [First] Book of Urizen*, self-closed discourse has arisen as a result of Urizen's withdrawal from dialogue, but in the Bard's retelling, he reframes Los's efforts to confine Urizen and enforce his otherness as an attempt to return Urizen to the dialogic fold:¹

Urizen lay in darkness & solitude, in chains of the mind lock'd up
 Los siezd his hammer & Tongs; he labourd at his resolute Anvil
 Among indefinite Druid rocks & snows of doubt & reasoning.

Refusing all Definite form, the Abstract Horror roofd. stony hard.
(*M* 3.6–9, *E* 96–97)

While Urizen lies in “solitude” “among indefinite Druid rocks” of “doubt & reasoning,” Los attempts to hammer Urizen into “definite form.” Interestingly, the Bard associates Urizen’s reasoning and abstraction with the material as well as the indefinite and opposes them to definite form. As an abstraction, Urizen remains indefinite because he refuses to focus on definite “minute particulars,” preferring instead to collectivize similar but distinct “minute particulars” into broad, abstract categories. The collectivizing activity of abstraction, moreover, imposes a single, limiting idea over the various individual “minute particulars” and, in ignoring the distinctions among them, erases their individual identities and finalizes them under the abstract name. Blake couches this finalizing aspect of abstraction in metaphoric terms of materiality with images of rocky hardness and opacity. The definite form that Los tries to provide for Urizen refers not to any finalized, material form, but to the “minute particularity” of individual identity. The difference of individual identity is a necessary prerequisite for dialogue, but it is one that is transcended through the dialogic process as individuals attempt to communicate across those differences. Los attempts to restore Urizen to dialogue by providing him with a definite form.

Los’s effort to force Urizen into definite form, however, amounts as much to imposition as does Urizen’s abstraction. Since the definite form that Urizen refuses comes from Los’s perspective only, it finalizes Urizen from without and does not develop through a dialogic process in which Urizen takes part. Instead of definite form and a return to dialogue, Los’s efforts result in the formation of a material body for Urizen, causing him to be “enraged & stifled without & within,” since he is unable to challenge this imposed finalization. Much as in *Urizen*, however, the formation of a separate and rigidly defined body for Urizen also produces a rigidly defined body, a finalized otherness, for Los. Once Urizen is removed from dialogue and encased in a body, Los, too, is cut off from dialogic contact with Urizen. Los “became what he beheld” when he attempts to impose definite form on Urizen (*M* 3.29, *E* 97).

Once this initial separation and embodiment takes place, Los acts to recover the lost fabric of dialogue by creating, with Enitharmon, the “Three Classes of Men,” which include the “Redeemed,” represented by Palamabron, the “Reprobate,” represented Rintrah, and the “Elect,” represented by Satan. These three classes form an all-inclusive

hierarchy upon which fallen Eternity is founded and is much like the hierarchy in the Printing House of Hell in the *Marriage*. In the hierarchy of the Printing House, the prolific eaglelike men and lions represent the imaginative center of the creative process, but the hierarchy also includes a devouring Dragon-Man, who is associated with Lockean reason and who clears “away the rubbish” produced by the eaglelike men and lions (*MHH* 15, E 40). Although he has a lesser role, the Dragon-Man plays a necessary function in the creative process. Palamabron and Rintrah labor to bring about the “Great Harvest,” a prolific and creative endeavor associated with “Eternal Life” and transcendent dialogue (*M* 3.42, 4.18, E 97, 98), while Satan operates the “Starry Mills,” a regulatory and devouring function, associated with “Eternal Death,” that turns the stars in the sky and marks time and space as it grinds down the temporal world (*M* 4.2, 17, E 97, 98). As Satan maintains the temporal, material world, he provides the differences and divisions between individuals that support dialogue but must be transcended for dialogic communication to occur.²

Satan, however, is reluctant to play a lesser role in Los’s hierarchy, a situation that continually threatens the stability of the hierarchy:

At last Enitharmon brought forth Satan Refusing Form, in vain
The Miller of Eternity made subservient to the Great Harvest
That he may go to his own place prince of the Starry Wheels.
Beneath the Plow of Rintrah & the Harrow of the Almighty
In the hands of Palamabron. Where the Starry Mills of Satan
Are built beneath the Earth & Waters of the Mundane Shell.
(*M* 3.41–4.3, E 97)

When Satan is created, he, like Urizen, unsuccessfully refuses definite form, since he is “*made* subservient” to Palamabron and Rintrah. Unlike Urizen, however, who was excluded from the eternal dialogic community, Satan is included as a necessary, albeit minor, part of the new order “Created by the Hammer of Los, & Woven / By Enitharmons Looms” (*M* 2.26–3.1, E 96). Even though Satan is subservient to Los, Palamabron, and Rintrah, he still has a voice in this hierarchical order, can offer his viewpoint, and even question the positioning of the hierarchy. When he does question his status, he receives a respectful response from Los, who argues for the necessity of Satan’s position:

O Satan my youngest born, art thou not Prince of the Starry Hosts
And of the Wheels of Heaven, to turn the Mills day & Night?
Art thou not Newtons Pantocrator weaving the Woof of Locke

To Mortals thy Mills seem every thing & the Harrow of Shaddai
 A scheme of Human conduct invisible & incomprehensible
 Get to thy Labors at the Mills & leave me to my wrath. (*M* 4.9–14, E 98)

According to Los, Satan and the machinations of reason have a necessary place in the hierarchy of eternity and are the only aspects of eternity perceived by mortals, a claim that not even the hierarchically superior Palamabron at “Harrow of Shaddai” can make. As “Newtons Pantocrator” who weaves “the Woof of Locke,” Satan is the god of reason and prince of the temporal, material world, a substantial, although minor, position in the eternal hierarchy. That Satan can question Los, who is hierarchically superior to him, points to the dialogic nature of the new order that Los has reestablished in the rubble of the fallen world.

Satan’s subservience, however, may put his place as a participant in dialogue on tentative ground, since those in power often coerce others to accept a perspective with which they might disagree. As soon as Los finishes explaining the necessity for Satan’s subservience, he quickly stifles Satan’s voice:

Satan was going to reply, but Los roll’d his loud thunders.

Anger me not! thou canst not drive the Harrow in pitys paths.
 Thy Work is Eternal Death, with Mills & Ovens & Cauldrons.
 Trouble me no more. thou canst not have Eternal Life

So Los spoke! Satan trembling obeyd weeping along the way.
 (*M* 4.15–19, E 98)

As Satan is about to continue his discussion with Los, Los exercises his superior discursive power to silence Satan. Here, the relation between Los and Satan shares similarities with the situation between the Eternals and Urizen in *Urizen*, since the Eternals’ naming of Urizen can be seen as an imposition. Under these circumstances, then, any attempt by Satan to counter Los’s discursive power could only be seen as an effort to regain his place in the dialogic community and to extract himself from Los’s monologic oppression.

But while some question remains in *Urizen* about whether the Eternals’ impose their discursive power on Urizen, the possibility that Los’s use of power to silence Satan constitutes imposition cannot be sustained. Although Los does stifle Satan’s reply in this particular instance, the Bard’s song indicates that Satan often questions Los’s hierarchy and eventually succeeds in altering it with Los’s consent:

Satan: with incomparable mildness;
 His primitive tyrannical attempts on Los: with most endearing love
 He soft intreated Los to give to him Palamabrons station;
 For Palamabron returnd with labour wearied every evening
 Palamabron oft refus'd; and as often Satan offer'd
 His service till by repeated offers and repeated intreaties
 Los gave to him the Harrow of the Almighty. (*M* 7.4–10, *E* 100)

According to the Bard, Satan makes several attempts to change his place in Los's hierarchy and repeatedly questions the hierarchical arrangement. Furthermore, Los does not seem to enforce the hierarchical structure through monologic power but instead defers to Palamabron, the individual who would be most affected if Satan were to occupy the Harrow of the Almighty. Los gives Palamabron the opportunity to voice his own opinion about the hierarchical arrangement. Only after Palamabron refuses Satan repeatedly, does Los step in to allow the change of positions to take place. Although Los's exercise of power on Satan's behalf could be seen as an imposition against Palamabron, it could also act as a check against any selfishness on Palamabron's part. Indeed, Palamabron worries that if he argues with Los, he could be perceived as selfish: "Palamabron. fear'd to be angry lest Satan should accuse him of / Ingratitude, & Los believe the accusation thro Satans extreme / Mildness" (*M* 7.11–13, *E* 100). By allowing Satan to take the Harrow from Palamabron, Los prevents the possibility of Palamabron maintaining his hierarchically superior position by coercion and imposition.

As the Bard suggests, however, Satan's mildness is "incomparable," "extreme," "primitive," and even "tyrannical," indicating that Satan hides his real intentions from Los in his questioning of the hierarchy. Instead of simply asking for an opportunity to explore other operations in the hierarchy and others' perspectives, Satan seems to be more interested in claiming more power for himself, an intent that Los does not perceive because it is obscured by Satan's mildness. According to the Bakhtinian framework for the addressivity of the utterance, Satan uses his extreme, tyrannical mildness to mask his intent and manipulate Los's response to suit his own ends. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, addressivity plays an essential part in the formation of every utterance: "Both the composition and, particularly, the style of the utterance depend on those to whom the utterance is addressed, how the speaker (or writer) senses and imagines his addressee, and the force of their effect on the utterance" ("PSG" 95). An awareness of the addressee allows a speaker to tailor what Bakhtin calls the speaker's "speech

plan" to his particular addressee and to anticipate the addressee's response.³ In this framework, "the immediate participants in communication, orienting themselves with respect to the situation and the preceding utterances, easily and quickly grasp the speaker's speech plan, his speech will. And from the very beginning of his words they sense the developing whole of the utterance" ("PSG" 77-78). In his addresses to Los, Satan recognizes that Los is his creator and is hierarchically superior to him. In order to reposition himself within the hierarchy, Satan must address Los in a style that does not provoke a negative response, so Satan adopts the style of extreme mildness. The stylistic aspect of Satan's speech plan disguises the semantic aspect. Satan's mildness masks his tyrannical intent and directs Los to respond favorably to him. Satan's discourse is, then, self-closed because instead of providing Los with the opportunity to interpret and respond freely to his whole utterance, Satan manipulates Los's understanding and limits his ability to respond.

Satan's ability to manipulate Los's understanding and response also depends on an arbitrary connection between sign and referent and points to a central pitfall in language based on the arbitrary sign. In dialogic communication, the arbitrary sign provides both speaker and listener the opportunity to produce and understand utterances creatively, as we have noted. Since no inherent connection exists between the sign and its referent, and since, as Locke states, "*Words, in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them*" (405; bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 2), individuals can use signs and interpret them creatively, bringing with them to the signifying process their own, unique perspective. Yet, this very arbitrariness in the sign also provides an individual with the opportunity to control others by limiting their abilities to respond. We have already seen how, in the *Songs*, the *Marriage*, and the *Book of Urizen*, those with privileged positions in the community of discourse often affirm their perspectives as truth by restricting the interpretive possibilities of the sign and deny others the opportunity to respond or to represent their own perspectives in the discursive network. In the Bard's Song, Blake presents the reader with how discursive power is seized from a hierarchically inferior position. Satan's style of extreme mildness hides his tyrannical intent and seduces Los into giving him Palamabron's position. To Los, Satan's words appear to be a request in the interest of understanding another's perspective, when they are instead designed to attain a more powerful position in the hierarchy. Los's interpretation and response, then, are limited by the appearance of Satan's request. Satan hides his intent in a duplicitous speech plan,

causing Los to misinterpret Satan's signs in a way that is favorable to Satan, as Satan had anticipated. Satan, whose aim is not communication but the usurpation of power, uses his awareness of the addressivity of the utterance and the arbitrary nature of the sign to limit Los's interpretive possibilities. Although Blake disagrees with Locke's caution to limit the interpretive potential of the arbitrary sign and to "speak properly" (Locke 408; bk. 3, ch. 2, sec. 8), he does suggest that an individual in the state of Selfhood will take advantage of the arbitrary nature of the sign through linguistic coercion to limit others' interpretive and responsive opportunities. According to Blake, the fault lies not in the arbitrary sign but in Selfhood.

Although Los does not recognize Satan's dissembling, Palamabron, whose station Satan covets and who is most affected by Los's misinterpretation, has known all along. He kept silent, however, when Los acceded to Satan's request because he feared that Satan would blame him for imposing. Later, after Satan fails at Palamabron's work behind the Harrow of the Almighty, Palamabron finds the horses of the Harrow "maddend" and the servants filled with "indignation fury and fire" (*M* 7.18–19, *E* 100). He then realizes the folly of his silence:

You know Satans mildness and his self-imposition,
Seeming a brother, being a tyrant, even thinking himself a brother
While he is murdering the just;

.....
O foolish forbearance
Would I had told Los, all my heart! (*M* 7.21–23, 28–29, *E* 100–101)

Although Palamabron has recognized Satan's tyrannical "self-imposition," he hesitates to inform Los when Los offers Satan Palamabron's station. Had Palamabron explained his interpretation of Satan's request to Los, Los might have interpreted Satan's words and their style of extreme mildness differently. Palamabron's self-censorship and its result indicate the need for a multiplicity of perspectives in dialogue to prevent linguistic coercion, as the Bard suggests when he states,

If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and
Not shew it: I do not account that Wisdom but Folly.
Every Mans Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality. (*M* 4.6–8, *E* 98)

Since each individual's knowledge is "peculiar," and therefore limited, to his own perspective, only dialogue among perspectives can transcend the limits of an individual's knowledge and broaden the scope

of interpretation, thereby preventing one perspective from dominating others. Such a multiplicity of perspectives is denied Los, causing him to misinterpret Satan's duplicitous speech plan. Without the benefit of dialogue to inform his understanding, Los is in a position to be exploited by Satan's linguistic tyranny.

Satan's manipulation of misunderstanding continues until Los performs an act of what can be called self-annihilation. When Palamabron finally shows Los the disarray in which Satan has left the Harrow, "Satan wept, / And mildly cursing Palamabron, him accus'd of crimes / Himself had wrought," almost causing Los to be persuaded that "Palamabron was Satans enemy" (*M* 7.33–35, E 101). His understanding of the situation still skewed by Satan's mildness and Palamabron's previous silence, Los admonishes Palamabron saying, "Henceforth Palamabron, let each his own station / Keep: nor in pity false, nor in officious brotherhood, where / None needs, be active" (*M* 7.41–43, E 101). This admonition only increases Palamabron's anger, which he continues to suppress. Satan then shows Los the confusion in which Palamabron has left Satan's mills, and Los finds the task of mediating between the two to be unmanageable: "What could Los do? how could he judge" (*M* 7.39, E 101). In attempting to restore the hierarchy that Satan disrupts, Los performs what can be seen as an act of self-annihilation. In the confusion of disruption, accusation, silence, and misinterpretation, Los acts to restore dialogue through self-annihilation by blaming himself for the disruption:

Ye Genii of the Mills! the Sun is on high
Your labours call you! Palamabron is also in sad dilemma;
His horses are mad! his Harrow confounded! his companions enrag'd.
Mine is the fault! I should have remember'd that pity divides the soul
And man, unmans: follow with me my Plow. this mournful day
Must be a blank in Nature: follow with me, and tomorrow again
Resume your labours, & this day shall be a mournful day

Wildly they follow'd Los and Rintrah, & the Mills were silent
They mourn'd all day this mournful day of Satan & Palamabron:
And the Elect & the Redeem'd mourn'd one toward another
Upon the mountains of Albion among the cliffs of the Dead.
(*M* 8.16–26, E 102)

Upon seeing the disruption in both Palamabron's and Satan's respective stations, Los realizes the problems for both Satan and Palamabron that the change in hierarchical positioning has caused, including the

problem of communication between the two. He then restores communication by blaming himself for the disruption, claiming that by taking pity on Satan and allowing him to assume Palamabron's job, he himself upset the proper order and has divided the members of that order against each other. In taking the blame himself and calling for a day of mourning, he restores them to their proper places in the hierarchy and restores the communicative link between them, as they "mourn'd one toward another." Instead of using his hierarchically superior position to judge in favor of one or the other, further dividing the two, Los annihilates his Selfhood and restores dialogue within the hierarchy.

The effects of Los's self-annihilation do not last, however, because neither Palamabron nor Satan follow Los's gesture and annihilate their Selfhoods to maintain dialogic communication, so the anger and indignation that results from the disruption in the hierarchy deepens the division among its members. Palamabron is not so willing to forget his displacement as Los would like him to be, and he calls an assembly to determine blame. At the assembly, Satan's veneer of mildness disintegrates, giving way to his rage at Palamabron and exposing his self-closed nature:

For Satan flaming with Rintrahs fury hidden beneath his own mildness
 Accus'd Palamabron before the Assembly of ingratitude! of malice:
 He created Seven deadly sins drawing out his infernal scroll,
 Of Moral laws and cruel punishments upon the clouds of Jehovah
 To pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth
 With thunder of war & trumpets sound, with armies of disease
 Punishments & deaths musterd & number'd; Saying I am God alone
 There is no other! let all obey my principles of moral individuality
 I have brought them from the uppermost innermost recesses
 Of my Eternal Mind, transgressors I will rend off for ever,
 As now I rend this accursed Family from my covering.

Thus Satan rag'd amidst the Assembly! (*M* 9.19–30, *E* 103)

As Satan's rage surfaces, he becomes like Urizen and, as Leopold Damrosch has noted, he imposes his own identity over the rest of Eternity (28). Satan's imposition, moreover, is achieved through self-closed discourse as he halts dialogic communication. As he proclaims himself "God alone," he privileges his own perspective over all others and maintains this position by issuing laws that create the "Seven deadly Sins" and by enforcing those laws with "cruel punishments."

Since these laws come “from the uppermost innermost recesses / of [Satan’s] Eternal Mind,” they represent Satan’s singular, limited perspective and are removed from dialogic inspiration. These laws are also designed to stifle the “Divine voice” of eternal, unfinalizable dialogue and to prevent others from expanding the limits of their own perspectives. Without dialogue, individuals would become divided from one another, forced to obey Satan’s imposed principles of “moral individuality” instead of enjoying individual identity constructed in dialogue. Each individual would be alone in following Satan’s imposed laws instead of negotiating their sociolinguistic position with others dialogically.

As Satan imposes his laws in his rage against the assembly, the division between individuals begins with Satan himself:

His bosom grew
Opake against the Divine Vision: the paved terraces of
His bosom inwards shone with fires, but the stones becoming opake!
Hid him from sight, in an extreme blackness and darkness,
And there a World of deeper Ulro was open’d, in the midst
Of the Assembly. In Satans bosom a vast unfathomable Abyss.

Astonishment held the Assembly in awful silence. (*M* 9.30–36, *E* 103)

When Satan imposes his laws stifling dialogue, he, in effect, removes himself from dialogue. His exterior becomes “opake,” indicating that the outline, to use Blake’s pictorial term, that differentiates himself from others becomes a barrier to communication, and the “fires” that shine from within become hidden behind his opacity. As Bakhtin explains, what is important for the individual in dialogue is “not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the *boundary* between one’s own and someone else’s consciousness, on the threshold. And everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another and in this tension filled encounter lies its entire essence. . . . A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary” (*PDP* 287). When Satan’s outline or boundary of individual identity becomes opaque as he withdraws from dialogue, he turns away from others, from the “tension filled encounter” of dialogue, and retreats inward, claiming an “internal sovereign territory” that does not exist except as a void. As Satan withdraws from the dialogic community, an “unfathomable Abyss” of “extreme blackness and darkness” appears in the assembly,

rendering its members silent, since dialogue fails to penetrate Satan's pronouncements. Upon Satan's withdrawal, "Then Los & Enitharmon knew that Satan is Urizen," the tyrannical Selfhood of monologic authority (*M* 10.1, *E* 104). Los exclaims,

Every thing in Eternity shines by its own Internal light: but thou
Darkenest every Internal light with the arrows of thy quiver
.....
That every thing is fixd Opaque without Internal light

So Los lamented over Satan, who triumphant divided the Nations.
(*M* 10.16–17, 20–21, *E* 104)

The internal light of individual identity seen in dialogue becomes hidden behind the opacity of Selfhood, divided and finalized by Satan's self-closed discourse. Satan is Urizen in that he privileges his own point of view over others and imposes it on others through linguistic coercion.

Satan then consolidates his monologic power when he separates himself and his mills farther away:

And the Mills of Satan were separated into a moony Space
.....
Where Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity.
Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission
Being call'd God: setting himself above all that is called God.
And all the Spectres of the Dead calling themselves Sons of God
In his Synagogues worship Satan under the Unutterable Name.
(*M* 11.6, 10–14, *E* 104)

As Satan continues to make "Laws from his own identity," his self-closed discourse coerces others to follow him, denying them a response to his laws as they are compelled to submit to them. While Satan privileges his point of view "above all that is called God" and is himself called God, his followers lose their individual identities as they call themselves by the collectivizing abstract label "Sons of God," even though they may not refer to Satan by "the Unutterable Name," which he has claimed for himself. As such, these "Spectres" are finalized into monologic death and removed from dialogue. Through self-closed discourse that is devoid of dialogic insight and inspiration, Satan reorganizes Los's dialogic order to benefit himself.

Although Satan's discourse lacks dialogic inspiration and denies others the opportunity to respond, the Bard's song, which tells this story, must not be self-closed if it is to inspire Milton without coercion, and the song contains some prominent indications that it does, indeed, carry inspiration in the dialogic sense. The first indication appears in the Bard's opening line when he exclaims, "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation" (*M* 2.25, E 96). With this opening, the Bard announces to his audience, the Sons of Albion with whom Milton sits, that they should take careful note of his words and interpret them well, since his words have to do with their "eternal salvation." As the *Marriage*, with its contrasted and competing interpretations of biblical history, suggests, to interpret well is to engage another's words creatively and to respond actively, instead of either passively accepting them without question or responding to them from an ideologically rigid, hence self-closed, perspective. This imperative to interpret well, then, is not a command to interpret the Bard's words as the Bard requires but is instead an appeal that recognizes the possibility that his listeners could just as likely interpret poorly. The Bard does not impose his song on his listeners as law, strictly enforcing his single vision as the only possible one, so he implores his listeners, repeating this line six more times throughout his song as a kind of refrain, to interpret his song dialogically. The one variation on this refrain, "Mark well my words! Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies" (*M* 4.26, E 98), further urges the Sons of Albion to respond to the Bard's song creatively, since "Corporeal Friends," those linked with materiality and monologic finalization, are enemies to the unfinalizable spirit of dialogic interaction. The Bard's appeal to the Sons of Albion urges them to avoid monologic tendencies in their interpretations and to keep the dialogic chain of communication open.

The dialogic nature of the Bard's song is further evidenced by the fact that when the Bard finishes his song, all the Sons of Albion vigorously question the Bard, and each interprets his song on an individual level:

The Bard ceas'd. All consider'd and a loud resounding murmur
 Continu'd round the Halls; and much they question'd the immortal
 Loud voic'd Bard. and many condemn'd the high tone'd Song
 Saying Pity and Love are too venerable for the imputation
 Of Guilt. Others said. If it is true! if the acts have been perform'd
 Let the Bard himself witness. Where hadst thou this terrible Song.
 (*M* 13.45–50, E 107)

"All" the listeners "consider'd" and "much they question'd" the Bard's song, an indication that the Bard denies none of them an opportunity to respond. Furthermore, their responses vary, suggesting that each Son of Albion responds as an individual rather than as a member of a collective. Just because they interpret the Bard's words on an individual basis does not necessarily mean, however, that they interpret well. Their interpretations might still be influenced by their own ideological predispositions. The "many" who "condemn'd" the Bard's song disagree with the Bard's description of pity as divisive and Satanic, arguing that it is too hallowed to be implicated in Satan's rise to monologic power. Rather than question the privileged position of pity in their thinking, they question the Bard's differing opinion of pity. Others question the literal truth of the Bard's song and demand to know its source, expecting "the acts" to "have been perform'd" and the Bard "himself" to bear witness to them. They seem to require legalistic testimony authorized by the Bard's presence at specific events and are unwilling to accept a dialogically constructed representation as anything other than hearsay. In privileging concepts that the Bard criticizes and rejecting other discursive modes, the Sons of Albion respond to the Bard's song from preconceived ideological perspectives, and their self-closed positions interrupt the dialogue that the Bard initiates. Nevertheless, the Bard does offer the Sons of Albion the opportunity to respond to his song freely and does not coerce them to accept what he sings as truth. The Sons of Albion may not interpret well, but they can, at least, interpret.

Not only does the Bard open his song to his listeners' interpretations, but he also indicates that his song has its origin not in "himself," as some of the Sons of Albion would expect, but in dialogic inspiration (*M* 13.50, *E* 107). In answering the Sons of Albion, the Bard indicates the source of his song:

I am inspired: I know it is Truth! for I Sing
According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity. (*M* 13.51–14.2, *E* 107–8)

According to the Bard, his song does not originate entirely from his own perspective but has its origin in a source outside himself, in the "Poetic Genius." The Bard's claim of inspiration encounters the most intense negative response: "Then there was great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion / . . . Shaking the roots & fast foundations of the Earth in doubtfulness" (*M* 14.4, 8, *E* 108). The reaction against

inspiration by the Sons of Albion is reminiscent of Locke's discussion of revelation and enthusiasm, in which he argues, "*Revelation* is natural *Reason* enlarged by a new set of Discoveries communicated by GOD immediately, which *Reason* vouches the Truth of" (698; bk. 4, ch. 19, par. 4). Without rational verification, one is left with nothing but "*Enthusiasm*," which is merely "the ungrounded Fancies of a Man's own Brain" (698; bk. 4, ch. 19, par. 3). The Sons of Albion, like Locke, disregard any kind of inspiration that cannot be proven rationally.⁴ Nevertheless, this otherness at the origin of his song protects it against the limits of self-closure and moves it into the realm of eternal dialogue. By opening his song to the discourse of others, to the dialogic realm that is the "Poetic Genius," the Bard removes himself as the sole author of his song and relinquishes his monopoly over its meaning, giving it a broader authority derived from a multitude of perspectives all of which participate in the creation of the song. In Blake's terms, the Bard has annihilated his authorial Selfhood and has acknowledged the necessity of other voices in the creation and reception of his song. He stands as Blake's exemplar of dialogic inspiration.

THE SELF-ANNIHILATION OF THE AUTHOR IN *MILTON*

Because of their ideological biases, the Sons of Albion begin to reject the Bard's song and to disallow its truth, but one in the assembly, Milton, is inspired by the story of monologic power and Los's attempt to restore dialogue:

Then Milton rose up from the heavens of Albion ardent!
The whole Assembly wept prophetic, seeing in Milton's face
And in his lineaments divine the shades of Death & Ulro
He took off the robe of the promise, & ungirded himself from the
oath of God

And Milton said, I go to Eternal Death! The Nations still
Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp
Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.

.....
I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,
Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate
And I be seiz'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood

.....
What do I here before the Judgment? without my Emanation?
With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration?

I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!
 He is my Spectre! in my obedience to loose him from my Hells
 To claim the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal Death.

And Milton said. I to Eternal Death! Eternity shudder'd. (*M* 14.10–16, 22–24, 28–33, *E* 108)

Upon hearing the Bard's song, Milton's first act is to "[ungird] himself from the oath of God." If, as the Bard claims, Satan has assumed the position of God through the enforcement of his laws, then Milton can be seen as renouncing his allegiance to Satan and surrendering his "moral individuality" in self-annihilation as an attempt to restore dialogue (*M* 9.26, *E* 103). He detests the Nations for following the divisive "Gods of Priam" who keep the Nations "contradicting and blaspheming" against their laws and warring against one another, and he himself does not want to remain divided in a state of Selfhood.⁵ He also claims that while in Selfhood, he is "that Satan" who, through self-closure, has divided from and oppressed his emanation, and he wants to throw off his Selfhood and reclaim his emanation before the Last Judgment. Under his monologic power, his emanation becomes the daughters of memory who copy "in thunder smoke and fire / His dictate," when they should be the daughters of inspiration who collaborate in the creation of his verse (*M* 17.13–14, *E* 110). Milton's efforts to annihilate his Selfhood are graphically depicted on plate 16, which shows a young Milton grappling with Urizen who clutches a pair of tablets (see Figure 4.1). Urizen, who is old and bearded, could also be Milton's Selfhood, since Milton, who writes the "Cruelties of Ulro" in "iron tablets" while in Selfhood, is "that Satan," who "is Urizen" (*M* 17.9–10, 14.30, 10.1, *E* 110, 108, 104). Milton's right foot reaches down to the single line of text below the illustration, "To Annihilate the Self-hood of Deceit & False Forgiveness," and breaks the word "Self-hood" in half at the hyphen. As Milton wrestles with Urizen, Milton can see a young bard and several musicians collaborating in the production of song, but Urizen stands in Milton's way with his back to the minstrels. The illustration suggests that Milton must annihilate his authorial Selfhood in order to reach this dialogic ideal, to free his discourse from self-closure, and to enter into an artistic collaboration with his emanation. When Milton hears the Bard's song—which is itself dialogically inspired—about Selfhood, self-annihilation, and the restoration of dialogue, Milton attempts to restore his emanation and himself to a dialogic relationship through self-annihilation.



Figure 4.1. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 18 (Erdman plate 16), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Library of Congress.

As we have noted, self-annihilation, for those in a state of Selfhood, always appears as Eternal death or worse, and the Bard's listeners have the same impression. The Sons of Albion fear for Milton when they see in his "face / And in his lineaments divine the shades of Death & Ulro" as he is about to annihilate his Selfhood, and they shudder when Milton himself claims that he goes to "Eternal Death." Rieger has suggested that this impression is the result of the Bard's audience, Milton included, misinterpreting the Bard's song (278). Hutchings adds that the difficulty lies in the individual having to give up his or her "complicity with established systems of power" and "to submit the comforting fiction of self-sovereignty to 'Eternal Death'" (290). Indeed, those in Selfhood, guided by the rigid ideologies imposed on them, always misperceive dialogic existence as nightmarishly indeterminate. As we have seen in our previous discussions, the Angel in the *Marriage* considers the Devil's energetic lot to be eternal "torment and insanity" (*MHH* 6, E 35), and in *Urizen*, Urizen views the Eternals' prelapsarian dialogic community as a kind of death characterized by "unquenchable burnings" (*U* 4.13, E 71). In *Jerusalem*, Albion considers self-annihilation to be worse than death when he exclaims, "O that Death & Annihilation were the same!" (*J* 23.40, E 169). In *Milton*, as in Blake's other works, the equation of self-annihilation with eternal death arises mainly because the Bard's audience fears that self-annihilation will mean the dissolution of identity. By rejecting the finalized moral individuality, the Selfhood, imposed on him by Satan's laws, Milton could no longer be called a Son of God and would no longer be identified by that collectivizing abstract term. What is more important, the annihilation of his Selfhood would allow others' discourses to inform his own, and he would no longer have an authorial monopoly over its meaning. His emanation would take part in the construction of his discourse and would be free to critique, judge, and alter his words as part of the collaborative process. By relinquishing the monopoly over the creation of his discourse, Milton could no longer claim to be the sole author of his discourse or of his own identity. In Charles Rzepka's formulation, the encounter with the other forever alters an individual's concept of self: "That the poet's self-for-another should finally take the form of one who has died is, then, appropriate. The anxiety of being an object for another is intimately connected with anxiety about death, the ultimate loss of subjectivity. Death is the fate of the self as something in the world, an object for others to judge and interpret as they will" (6-7). On the linguistic level, one's

discourse becomes an object of interpretation for another, and at the moment of reception, the speaker no longer has control over the fate of his utterance. The Romantic period begins to see inspiration as a “crisis of subjectivity” that involves a “unique interaction and inter-contamination of the psychic and textual” in which the “process of composition may become a defamiliarisation of received categories of text, world and self so intense as to threaten the very sanity of the writer” (Timothy Clark 11). According to Blake, one in a state of Selfhood views this loss of control as death, so the Selfhood tends to impose an interpretation on listeners. Self-annihilation, however, makes this loss of control a necessity for dialogic communication.

Regardless of his fears about Eternal Death, Milton annihilates his Selfhood because he realizes that the Bard’s song carries the dialogic inspiration that his own discourse has lacked. When the Bard enters Milton’s bosom after he is questioned by the Sons of Albion, Milton, himself, becomes “explicitly multiple and self-different” (Hutchings 284). With his Selfhood annihilated, moreover, Milton learns that his identity is not dissolved but sustained by the dialogic community represented by the Seven Angels of the Presence, who are connected with the Divine Vision and appear both with and as “One Man Jesus the Saviour” (*M* 21.59–60, 42.11, *E* 116, 143). Although the Seven Angels claim to be states and not individuals, they are seven different, discrete beings to whom “the Divine Humanity & Mercy” gave “a Human Form / Because we were combind in Freedom & holy Brotherhood” (*M* 32.14–15, *E* 131). Their human form, freedom, and brotherhood brings these different beings together, and the appearance of these Seven Angels as “One Man Jesus the Saviour” suggests that their discourses influence, respond to, and merge with each other’s, while at the same time retaining the individuality of each Angel.⁶ By contrast, “those combind by Satans Tyranny”

are Shapeless Rocks

Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Bredth & Highth
Calling the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition
In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy. (*M* 32.16–20,
E 132)

Instead of a dialogic community of individuals, Satan’s tyranny removes individuality completely and replaces it with his own identity, his “Mathematic Holiness,” and rejects the dialogic “Human Imagination,” which gives eternal life, as “madness & blasphemy.” They counsel Milton to

Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States.
 States change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease:
 You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die.

.....

Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore
 What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!

The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself
 Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from Imagination
 The Memory is a State always, & Reason is a State
 Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created
 Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot
 The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
 But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever. Amen Hallelujah

Thus they converse with the Dead watching round the Couch of
 Death. (*M* 32.22–24, 30–39, *E* 132)

As they converse with Milton, they remind him that individual identity, like the definite form that Satan refused when he was created, never changes but remains eternal. These identities, constructed in dialogue, remain eternal because they are unfinalizable as they pass through various states. That which is created, the material world of solid obstruction and the finalization of monologic imposition, change and are, therefore, “annihilable.” The material world eventually crumbles, and the dialogic imagination rises up against Selfhood to restore unfinalizability. As Milton annihilates his Selfhood, he turns his back “upon these Heavens builded on cruelty” and, through conversation with the Seven Angels of the Presence, becomes a “Man of Imagination” (*M* 32.3, 6, *E* 131).

Although Milton undergoes self-annihilation to redeem his emanation, his emanation also goes through a self-annihilating process. Having been oppressed by Milton’s self-closure, his emanation could react against him and impose their own self-closure over him, unless they, too, annihilate their Selfhoods, a situation of monologic backlash that Blake has often explored, especially in the *Marriage* and in *Urizen*, where the oppressed becomes the oppressor. Milton’s sixfold emanation, named Ololon, is a peculiar figure who at different times is referred to with the pronouns “they” and “she.” Although the sixfold emanation, “scatter’d thro’ the deep / In torment,” is mentioned as early as plate 2 (*M* 2.19–20, *E* 96), the name Ololon only appears

late in the poem on plate 21 and refers not to the emanation but to “a sweet river of mild and liquid pearl” “on whose banks dwelt those who Milton drove / Down into Ulro” (*M* 21.15–17, *E* 115). The name first refers to a place where Milton’s emanation, his three wives and three daughters, reside. As the poem continues, however, the name “Ololon” refers to the emanation instead of the dwelling place, but the pronoun “they” is used not only to stand for the emanation but also to indicate the discreteness of each individual within the emanation. The plural pronoun could reflect either a self-closed division between individuals within the emanation or the different identities of individuals in the emanation united in dialogue. Regardless of their state within the emanation, however, they are still divided from Milton. On plate 36, however, when Ololon descends into the speaker’s garden “as One Female” (*M* 36.16, *E* 137) to reunite with Milton, Ololon becomes a “she,” a completely integrated female figure, much like the Seven Angels of the Presence who become integrated as “One Man” (*M* 42.11, *E* 143). The naming of Ololon and the shift from the third person plural pronoun to the singular indicate the progress they/she undergo(es) as the emanation moves from six individuals divided in Selfhood yet combined by Milton’s Satanic tyranny to six individuals united in dialogue, inspired by the Divine Vision. Nevertheless, until they reunite with Milton in dialogue at the end of the poem, they remain, as the pun on the name suggests, “all alone.”

The self-annihilation of Ololon goes beyond the integration of internal division and is marked by more than changes in pronouns. While in Eden, which is in Ulro, Ololon lament what they believe is their role in Milton’s descent into what appears to be eternal death:

And they lamented that they had in wrath & fury & fire
Driven Milton into the Ulro; for now they knew too late
That it was Milton the Awakener: they had not heard the Bard,
Whose song call’d Milton to the attempt. (*M* 21.31–34, *E* 116)

Even though the poem clearly indicates, as early as plate 2, that the Bard’s song caused Milton to enter what appeared to be eternal death, Ololon lament that their own wrath, fury, and fire had been the cause of Milton’s descent. Since Milton’s tyranny, which had oppressed them and driven them into Ulro, caused their wrath, they could only assume that their wrath had in some way tyrannized Milton, causing a monologic backlash against him and forcing him into eternal death. Whether they had not heard the Bard’s song because of a disruption of dialogue or simply because the song was addressed to the Sons

of Albion in heaven while Ololon was in Ulro is unclear, yet from their perspective, they assume the blame themselves as the cause of Milton's descent, rather than pointing to others and imposing the blame on them. Their lamentation is reminiscent of the situation in which Los blames himself for the disruption in his postlapsarian dialogic hierarchy and, in that sense, constitutes an annihilation of Selfhood. Los could have imposed his power over Palamabron and Satan, issuing laws and exacting punishment, to restore the hierarchy that Satan's repositioning had disrupted but instead blamed himself for the disruption in order to forestall the growing division among the members of the hierarchy. Ololon blame themselves and their wrath for Milton's descent, and in accepting the blame even though they are blameless, their lamentation is also an act of self-annihilation. Since they are in a position of powerlessness in relation to Milton, however, their self-annihilation operates to prevent the kind of monologic backlash that the oppressed often perpetrate against their oppressor when the oppressor's power comes to an ebb. Although Palamabron and Satan continue to assess blame and retribution following Los's self-annihilation, Ololon annihilate their Selfhood in a lamentation of self-blame following Milton's self-annihilation, thereby preventing the kind of continued division that retribution would perpetuate.

Ironically, however, Ololon's lament is barely heard and nearly fails to find a place in the world of discourse, a condition that would prevent it from finding an opening to dialogue. This lack of force in their lament indicates a lack of monologic authority or imposition, which is also characteristic of the lament genre. Although "they wept in long resounding song / For seven days of eternity" (*M* 21.17–18, *E* 115), their weak voices are nearly stifled:

But when the clarions of day sounded they drownd the lamentations
And when night came all was silent in Ololon: & all refusd to lament
In the still night fearing lest they should others molest. (*M* 21.25–27,
E 115–16)

Ololon's lament begins in the mornings of the "seven days of eternity" but is drowned out by the "clarions of day." At night, it is silent, fearing that it will impose on others. As a discourse that nearly goes unheard, it can neither "molest" others nor rise above the louder clarions to communicate fully the blame that Ololon place on themselves for driving Milton into Ulro. If Ololon's lament were going to assert itself to find a place in dialogue, one would think it would have to communicate its self-blame forcefully to be heard above the

many other voices around it. Such force, however, runs contrary to the lament genre, which centers around its own inadequacy, as Francis Landy notes in a commentary on the biblical Lamentations: "The discourse attempts to explain, illustrate, and thus mitigate the catastrophe, to house it in a familiar literary framework; it must also communicate its own inadequacy. Its success, in a sense, depends on its failure. This happens, for example if a poem fades out in a whimper or an ineffectual cry for revenge, and it has to recognize the silence that exhausts it, the power of the enemy, and the necessity of starting again" (329). To mitigate a catastrophe, a lament must recognize and enact its own inadequacy in the face of catastrophe, so it can bring the catastrophe to an end and bring about a new beginning. A forceful assertion of wrath and fury or even of self-blame may prevent the advent of a new beginning, since either would resist the silence that exhausts the catastrophe. By accepting the blame for Milton's descent and, at the same time, refusing to raise their voice to the level of adequacy, Ololon annihilate their Selfhood to end the division that keeps them divided from Milton.

Ololon's lament does not go completely unheard, however. Los and Enitharmon hear it, although they cannot see Ololon because "the blue Mundane Shell inclosed them in" (*M* 21.30, E 116), and the Divine Family, to whom the lament is addressed, hears them and descends to them "as One Man even Jesus" (*M* 21.58, E 116). The Divine Family then explains that although "Milton goes to Eternal Death,"

Miltons Angel knew

The Universal Dictate; and you also feel this Dictate.

And now you know this world of Sorrow, and feel Pity. Obey

The Dictate! Watch over this World, and with your brooding wings,

Renew it to Eternal Life: Lo! I am with you alway

But you cannot renew Milton he goes to Eternal Death. (*M* 21.43, 52–57, E 116)

As Ololon annihilate their Selfhoods through lamentation, they enter eternal dialogue and receive inspiration from the Divine Family in the form of a Universal Dictate. Although the Divine Family issues a "Dictate" and urges Ololon to "obey" it, the Divine Family does not squelch Ololon's voice. Ololon express their preference to descend with Milton to renew him and to reunite with him: "Let us descend also, and let us give / Ourselves to death in Ulro" (*M* 21.45–46, E 116). Because they retain the opportunity to respond, even contrarily to

the Universal Dictate of the Divine Family, their voice has not been subsumed by a monologic power. The Universal Dictate is not a discourse of monologic tyranny but is, rather, one of dialogic inspiration much like the muse's "dictates" that inspire the poet's song. Nevertheless, Ololon are no longer six of "the seven rocky masses terrible" writing down Milton's tyrannical dictates about the cruelties of Ulro. They are now charged with renewing the rest of the world to eternal dialogic life (*M* 17.17, E 110). Later in the poem, "the Divine Voice was heard in the Songs of Beulah" "in the Lamentations of Ololon" (*M* 33.1, 24, E 132, 133). With their Selfhoods annihilated, their discourse then carries dialogic inspiration.

Toward the end of the poem, the drama of authorial self-annihilation and inspiration comes to a climax as Ololon, who have united "as One Female" (*M* 36.16, E 137), Satan, and Milton appear together before the poem's speaker in his garden after having been completely separate through the entire poem, and the three engage in a dialogue that restores Satan to his subordinate station and reunites Milton and Ololon in inspiration. As Milton confronts Satan, he declares his self-annihilation as a means to undermine Satan's monologic tyranny:

Satan! my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihilate
 And be a greater in thy place, & be thy Tabernacle
 A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater comes
 And smites me as I smote thee & becomes my covering.
 Such are the Laws of thy false Heavns! but Laws of Eternity
 Are not such: know thou: I come to Self Annihilation
 Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually
 Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee.
 Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches
 Is to impress on men the fear of death; to teach
 Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject selfishness
 Mine is to teach Men to despise death & to go on
 In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn
 Thy Laws & terrors, shaking down thy Synagogues as webs. (*M*
 38.29–42, E 139)

Rather than overthrowing Satan by force and asserting himself in Satan's place, Milton instead annihilates his Selfhood and offers an alternative vision to Satan's. By annihilating his Selfhood, Milton halts the process whereby one individual seeks dominance over others as described in the "Laws of [Satan's] false Heavns." If Milton were to dominate Satan, he would only be validating Satan's laws and put himself in a position of being dominated by a greater power. Instead,

Milton dialogizes Satan's laws by questioning them, which is the key, as Hutchings argues, to breaking the cycle of oppression (289). Whereas Satan imposes on others the "fear of death," "constriction," and "abject selfishness," Milton exposes Satan's impositions as entangling and limiting discursive webs and offers an alternative vision that despises death and laughs at "Laws & terrors." Although Satan responds to Milton's declaration by claiming that he is "God the judge of all, the living & the dead" and commanding Milton to "fall therefore down & worship me" (*M* 38.51–52, *E* 139), his laws are nullified and his status reduced because as "Ancient Night spread over all the heavn his Mantle of Laws / He trembled with exceeding great trembling & astonishment" (*M* 39.30–31, *E* 140). Significantly, Satan is neither destroyed nor silenced in the poem but is left to howl and thunder in the background. Milton has engaged Satan's monologic authority by questioning it and by undermining it with a contrary vision, thereby restoring dialogue to the world once dominated by Satan's power without resorting to a monologic strategy himself. Although Satan's power and position have been considerably reduced, his voice has not been entirely excluded.

As Ololon witnesses the effects of the confrontation between Satan and Milton, she fears that her complicity as copyist in the creation of Milton's formerly self-closed discourse will cause the annihilation of the Children of Jerusalem, since "Milton's Religion" had branded "Jerusalem as a Harlot & her Sons as Reprobates" (*M* 22.39, 47, *E* 117). She sees Milton "in Self annihilation giving [his] life to [his] enemies" and asks him,

Are those who condemn Religion & seek to annihilate it
 Become in their Feminine portions the causes & promoters
 Of these Religions, how is this thing?

.....
 Is Ololon the cause of this? O where shall I hide my face
 These tears fall for the little-ones: the Children of Jerusalem
 Lest they be annihilated in thy annihilation. (*M* 40.8–11, 14–16, *E* 141)

Ololon begins to realize without quite comprehending what Milton has come to understand: that dominating and silencing "Religion," the laws of Satan, only serves to validate those very laws. Believing herself the cause and promoter of "these Religions," she realizes that Milton's self-annihilation is about to affect her. Yet, she fears not for herself but for those whom "Milton's Religion" has dominated: Jerusalem's

children. She fears that as the Satanic laws are undone, those labeled and defined within it, especially those for whom the labels and definitions are oppressive, will also be undone and their identities removed. Ololon's fears suggest that she still sees self-annihilation as eternal death and the dissolution of identity. Her questioning Milton about self-annihilation and her lack of fear for herself suggest, however, that she is ready for a dialogic reunion with Milton.

As Milton responds to Ololon, he reassures her about the Children of Jerusalem and about the purpose of his self-annihilation:

All that can be annihilated must be annihilated
That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
.....
I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration
That it no longer shall dare to mock with the aspersion of Madness
Cast on the Inspired, by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots,
Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes; or paltry Harmonies. (*M* 40.30–31,
41.2–10, *E* 142)

By dissolving the oppression of monologism, Milton's self-annihilation will not destroy the Children of Jerusalem but will liberate them from finalizing definitions and allow them to redefine and reinvent themselves through dialogic inspiration. They will be free from the self-closure imposed by rational demonstration, memory, and the empiricism of Bacon, Locke, and Newton, just as faith, inspiration, and imagination are revived with the restoration of dialogue. Most importantly for the dialogically inspired author, Milton will rid poetry of self-closed discourse and reinvigorate it with dialogic inspiration. No longer will such an author be considered mad by self-closed authors "who pretend to Poetry that they may destroy Imagination; / By imitation of Natures Images drawn from Remembrance" (*M* 41.23–24, *E* 142). The inspired author will restore and be restored to his or her rightful place in dialogue, while the finalizing voice of the author in Selfhood will be diminished, though not silenced, relegated to devouring the creative excesses left by prolific inspiration.

Although Milton explains self-annihilation to Ololon, she can still only recognize it as eternal death, since she is still divided from Milton,

but realizing that their separation diminishes their dialogic capacity, she declares, “Thou goest to Eternal Death & all must go with thee” (*M* 42.2, *E* 143). With this declaration, she annihilates her Selfhood and disintegrates into her six component parts. Once annihilated, she recombines with Milton in the poem’s most powerful moment:

Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to Felphams Vale
 In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with dreadful thunderings
 Into the Fires of Intellect that rejoic’d in Felphams Vale
 Around the Starry Eight: with one accord the Starry Eight became
 One Man Jesus the Saviour. wonderful! round his limbs
 The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
 Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing
 Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression:
 A Garment of War, I heard it namd the Woof of Six Thousand Years.
 (*M* 42.7–15, *E* 143)

As Ololon reintegrates in “the Fires of Intellect,” the Starry Eight, Milton and the Seven Angels of the Presence, combine to form “One Man Jesus the Saviour,” the Divine Humanity and the quintessence of identity in dialogic communion. Ololon rejoices around Milton/Jesus, reunited in dialogic inspiration, and as their words become the “Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression,” all imposition and duplicity in speech plan are removed from the arbitrary sign. As Milton annihilates his Selfhood and reunites with his emanation, he relinquishes his monopoly over his discourse and opens it to the discourse of others, giving it the greater authority of dialogic inspiration, even though his role as author is diminished.

THE SELF-ANNIHILATION OF THE AUTHOR OF *MILTON*

As a poem about an author, *Milton* draws more attention to the role of the author in the creative process than any other of Blake’s works, but as a poem per se, it, too, has its own author who must also negotiate his role within the creative process. Not only does *Milton* chart the authorial self-annihilation of its title character, but it also dramatizes the self-annihilation of its own author, as represented by the poem’s speaker. The attention that *Milton* draws to its authorial presence begins on the title page. Although Blake had abandoned the use of the term “author” on his title pages as early as the *Marriage*—preferring instead to refer to himself as “printer” or “publisher”—the title page of

Milton reinstates this identification of “W Blake” as “author.” Also, *Milton* clearly identifies its speaker with its author, placing the authorial presence directly in the poem. On plate 15, the speaker describes Milton as a star “on my left foot falling” (*M* 15.49, E 110), and the accompanying illustration in the text on 15 is blown up in a full-page illustration following plate 29 that labels the figure receiving the falling star as “William” (see Figure 4.2). On plate 36, where the speaker receives Ololon “in my Garden / Before my Cottage” in Felpham (*M* 36.19–20, E 137), the accompanying illustration identifies the cottage as “Blake’s Cottage at Felpham” (see Figure 4.3). The illustrations identify the speaker as the author of the poem—an identification Blake does not explicitly make in any other of his poems—and surround the poem with an authorial presence that hovers over the poem as if it were guarding and monopolizing the text and the creation of meaning. Indeed, the position of “author” on the title page may indicate that the authorial presence is in Selfhood, since it appears near Milton’s left foot, the left foot indicating Selfhood (Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* 140). In the production of any text, however, the author must undergo self-annihilation if the text is to avoid self-closure and convey dialogic inspiration. While Milton undergoes authorial self-annihilation during the poem to bring dialogic inspiration into his discourse, the author of *Milton*, as represented by the speaker, simultaneously annihilates his Selfhood to ensure that his discourse is not self-closed.⁷

The self-annihilation of *Milton*’s authorial presence begins with the invocation at the beginning of the poem. In the invocation, the speaker calls to the “Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song,” expecting them to “come into my hand / By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm / From out the Portals of my Brain” to “record the journey of immortal Milton” (*M* 2.1–2, 5–7, E 96). When the speaker of *Milton* calls to the muses in the invocation, he rhetorically places both himself and the voices of others directly into the poem, displacing himself as the sole author or originator of the poem. Since the invocation is a call to an absent or imaginary figure, it is also a specialized case of the figure of apostrophe, which, as Paul de Man has shown, sets up in the poem a discourse between two speaking subjects. As the poet calls to the muse, he assumes that the muse can both hear him and reply to his call; apostrophe implies prosopopoeia, the rhetorical figure in which an absent or imaginary figure addresses the poem’s speaker (47). Instead of a narrative with a single speaker, like that which the Bard appears to deliver to the Sons of Albion, the reader of the poem witnesses the speaker in the process of opening his

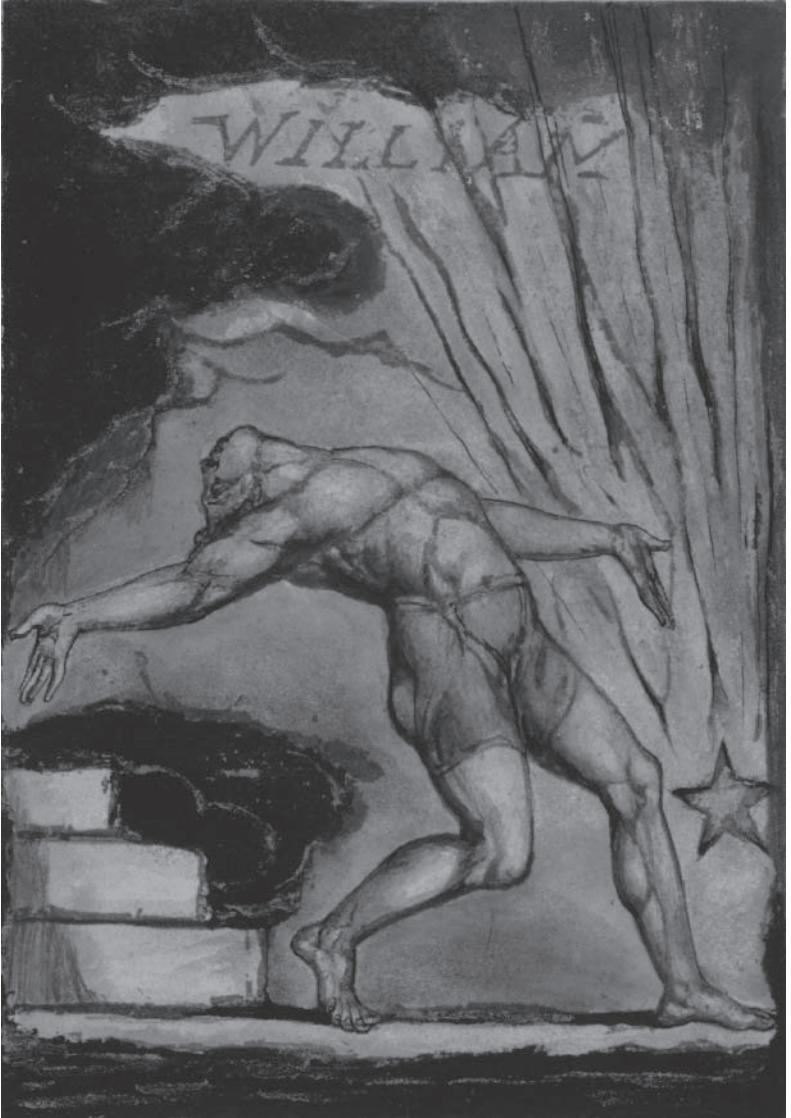


Figure 4.2. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 32 (Erdman not numbered), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Library of Congress.

discourse to dialogic inspiration, developing a collaboration between himself and his muses that generates the poem in its entirety. While the Bard's claim of inspiration at the end of his song does not persuade the Sons of Albion to believe what he tells them as they go off to shake

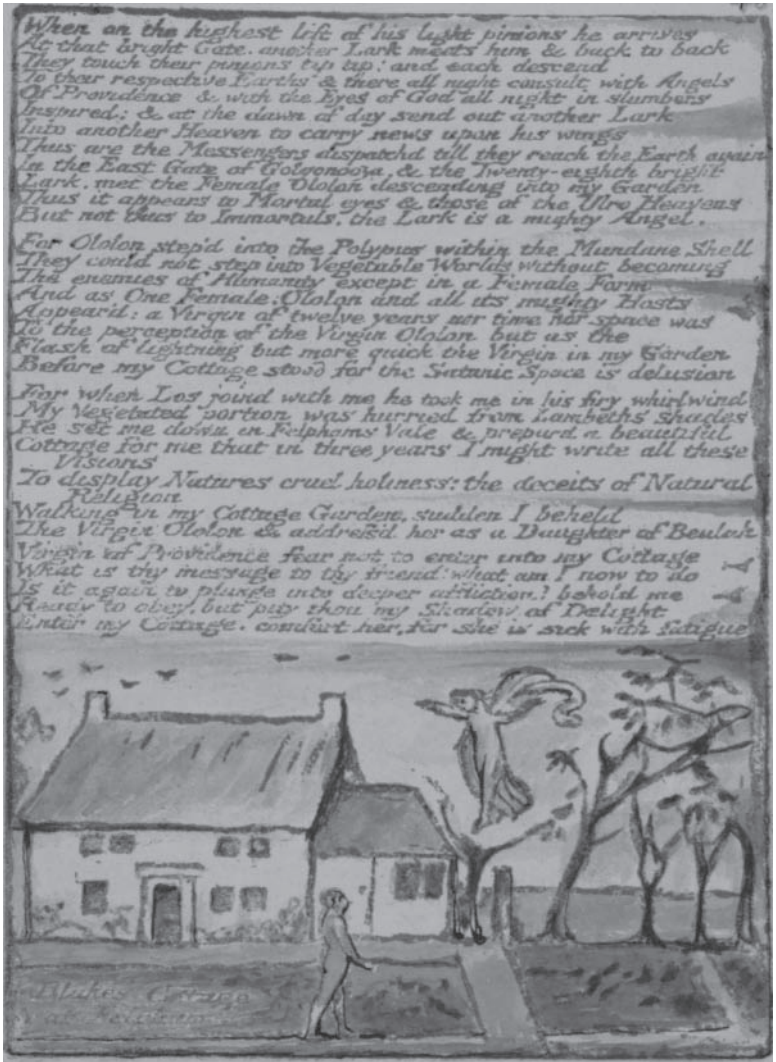


Figure 4.3. Milton a Poem, copy D, plate 40 (Erdman plate 36), Rare Book and Special Collections Division, the Library of Congress.

“the roots & fast foundations of the Earth in doubtfulness” (*M* 14.8, E 108), the speaker’s invocation at the beginning of the poem provides a dramatization of his entrance into dialogue.

One might consider that Blake simply follows literary convention in the style of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* by opening the poem with an invocation. Blake’s invocation, however, stands in stark contrast

to that of *Paradise Lost* and, indeed, redefines the generic function of the invocation. In the opening invocation of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's speaker calls on his muse for aid in the creation of his poem, but the speaker makes clear that he is the sole author of the poem and that his poem conveys unquestionable truth:

I thence

Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' *Aonian* Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme.

.....
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. (I.12–16, 24–26)

Although Milton's speaker requires the muse's aid for support and information, he claims that *Paradise Lost* is "*my* advent'rous Song" that will surpass all other discourses, in "Prose or Rhyme," in asserting "Eternal Providence." Once he alone justifies "the ways of God to men," he will have finalized them against any differing or competing interpretation. Although Milton makes use of the invocation, the perspective that the poem presents is the speaker's own, since he excludes the muse's voice from the creative process.

The invocation of Blake's *Milton*, however, greatly reduces the authority of its authorial presence. Although the title page initially shows its author—and John Milton's motto, "To Justify the Ways of God to Men"—in a position of Selfhood by the title character's left foot, the invocation soon shows the author in a considerably lesser role in the creation of his poem compared to that of *Paradise Lost*'s author. Indeed, the speaker seems to play a rather passive role in the creative process, since the Daughters of Beulah would take control of the poet's right arm and guide it across the page, turning the author of the poem into a mere instrument for writing. Yet the relationship between the muses and the speaker is less passive than it seems and is, rather, collaborative, since it is the speaker's own invocation that brings the muses into the creative process in the first place, initiating the creation of the poem by calling to the muses. The speaker of *Milton*, though, makes no claim for authorship, instead asking his muses to "record the journey of immortal Milton" for him. Rather than asserting the truth of his discourse, the speaker relinquishes his

monopoly over the production of meaning by opening the creative process to dialogue.

As an annihilation of authorial Selfhood, moreover, the invocation also shows the speaker to be wary of the muses with whom he collaborates. Self-annihilation, as we have seen, appears as "Eternal Death" to one in Selfhood, since relinquishing control over one's discourse implies the dissolution of identity. Also, since self-closed discourse coerces its listeners into accepting its "truths" unchallenged, self-annihilation could cause an individual to find his or her discourse infiltrated by the self-closed discourse of another. The invocation notes that the Daughters of Beulah belong to "Realms / Of terror & mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delusions / Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose / His burning thirst & freezing hunger!" and that they know the discourse of "the False Tongue! vegetated" that comes from "beneath [their] land of shadows," demanding "sacrifices" and "offerings," "even till Jesus, the image of the Invisible God / Became its prey; a curse, an offering, and an atonement" (*M* 2.2–5, 10–13, *E* 96). This realm of the Daughters of Beulah is one of the appetites of the body and of their satisfaction, a place not often considered as one of poetic inspiration, and the discourse of the False Tongue is the discourse of self-closure that imposes laws and exacts punishment to enforce them. As Cooper has noted, the Daughters of Beulah are much like patrons. They are necessary evils for the composition of *Milton*, but then *Milton* becomes the product of potentially misleading muses ("Blake's Escape" 96–97). Hutchings points out the similarity between the Daughters of Beulah entering the poet's brain and Leutha entering Satan's brain, suggesting that Blake may be aware that his poetic opposition to Miltonic dictates could be just as susceptible to the same kind of imposition (280). The speaker, however, wants to know of Milton's travels through this realm, and from the muses, he can receive a firsthand account. While theirs is a "realm of terror" and of "soft sexual delusions," it is also a realm of "varied beauty" that brings "delight" to "the wanderer." The speaker also recognizes that the Daughters' "ministry" is responsible for planting the paradise of the "Great Humanity Divine" in his brain (*M* 2.7–8, *E* 96), an indication that they have some connection with dialogic inspiration, even though their realm also involves delusion, bodily appetites, and terror. The speaker's problem, then, lies in whether he can trust the muses' information. He must somehow determine whether it is inspiration or delusion.

As the invocation dramatizes, problems in communication exist even between an inspired author and the muse with whom he or

she collaborates. Not only does the speaker question the truth of his muses' words, but he also questions his ability to understand the muses accurately:

Can such an Ear filld with the vapours of the yawning pit.
 Judge of the pure melodious harp struck by a hand divine?

 Can such a Tongue boast of the living waters? or take in
 Ought but the Vegetable Ratio & loathe the faint delight
 Can such gross Lips perceive? alas! folded within themselves
 They touch not ought but pallid turn & tremble at every wind.
 (*M* 5.30–31, 34–37, *E* 99)

The speaker questions the ability of the senses, which are rooted in the body and function solely in accord with “the Vegetable Ratio,” to perceive and communicate that which emerges from the dialogic realm of “the living waters” and of “the pure melodious harp struck by a hand divine.” The materiality of the body limits humankind’s ability to perceive and communicate and serves to isolate each person from every other:

The Eye of Man a little narrow orb closd up & dark
 Scarcely beholding the great light conversing with the Void
 The Ear, a little shell in small volutions shutting out
 All melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony
 The Tongue a little moisture fills, a little food it cloyes
 A little sound it utters & its cries are faintly heard. (*M* 5.21–26, *E* 99)

The organs of the senses, according to Blake, can do little more than close off a person from the outside, from perceiving “the great light conversing with the Void,” and from participating in that conversation with only cries “faintly heard.” The possibility of accurately receiving information from another and engaging that other in dialogue seem extremely limited, since the senses make an individual vulnerable to self-closure.

Although the speaker doubts whether dialogue can overcome the monologic tendencies of the fallen world and “Eternal Death,” he continues his poem and his struggle with self-annihilation. Later in the poem, as the speaker’s doubts reemerge, he makes another invocation that brings yet another voice into the creative process:

O how can I with my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust,
 Tell of the Four-fold Man, in starry numbers fitly orderd
 Or how can I with my cold hand of clay! But thou O Lord

Do with me as thou wilt! for I am nothing, and vanity.
 If thou chuse to elect a worm, it shall remove the mountains.
 (*M* 20.15–19, *E* 114)

The speaker, with his “gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust” and his “cold hand of clay,” regrets the monologic barriers to inspiration that seem to restrict his ability to “tell of the Four-fold Man.” The speaker, however, is not just afraid that he will perform poorly, but more significantly, his address to the Lord to “do with me as thou wilt” and his reduction of self to “nothing” is a move toward self-annihilation. Instead of asserting himself and claiming monologic control over his discourse, the speaker relinquishes his authorial monopoly by engaging in dialogue first with the Daughters of Beulah and here, in this later invocation, to the Lord. By relinquishing authority over the creation of the poem, the speaker allows it to be informed by a dialogue with a multitude of voices and perspectives—the Daughters (plural) of Beulah and the Lord. Instead of a product of self-closure, the poem becomes the product of competing points of view in dialogue. No one viewpoint retains complete control over the poem, but all find their places in it, creating a dialogic community in which all speakers have the opportunity to participate.

The speaker’s final moment of self-annihilation occurs near the end of the poem when Los appears and the two merge:

Los descended to me:

And Los behind me stood; a terrible flaming Sun: just close
 Behind my back; I turned round in terror, and behold.
 Los stood in that fierce glowing fire; & he also stoop’d down
 And bound my sandals on in Udan-Aden; trembling I stood
 Exceedingly with fear & terror, standing in the Vale
 Of Lambeth: but he kissed me and wishd me health.
 And I became One Man with him arising in my strength:
 Twas too late now to recede. Los had enterd into my soul:
 His terrors now posses’d me whole! I arose in fury & strength.
 (*M* 22.5–14, *E* 116–17)

As Los descends to the speaker, he turns in terror and stands trembling “exceedingly with fear,” still unsure whether self-annihilation will cause the dissolution of his identity. Los reassures the speaker with kindness, and the two merge as “One Man” in dialogic union, their individual identities intact. As Los enters the speaker’s soul, the speaker may be possessed by Los’s terrors, but he remains “whole.”

Also, when they return to the Gate of Golgonooza, Rintrah and Palamabron meet them and address Los in the second person and refer to the speaker in the third person, a further indication that their individual identities do not dissolve: "O Father most beloved! . . . / Whence is this Shadow terrible? Wherefore dost thou refuse / To throw him into the Furnaces!" (*M* 22.29, 31–33, E 117). Although Rintrah and Palamabron question Los's judgment in merging with the speaker, this union is what precipitates the entire poem:

For when Los joind with me he took me in his firy whirlwind
 My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeth's shades
 He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepar'd a beautiful
 Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these Visions
 To display Natures cruel holiness: the deceits of Natural Religion.
 Walking in my Cottage Garden, sudden I beheld
 The Virgin Ololon & address'd her as a Daughter of Beulah.
 (*M* 36.21–27, E 137)

As Los merges with the speaker, he brings the speaker to Felpham, and Ololon, as "One Female," descends to the speaker (*M* 36.16, E 137). When the speaker addresses the sixfold Ololon as a Daughter of Beulah, the poem is returned, as if by a vortex, to its beginning and its opening invocation to the "Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's Song" (*M* 2.1, E 96). While the poem has been describing Milton's self-annihilation in preparation for his reunion with Ololon, it has also been carrying out the self-annihilation of its own speaker in preparation for the writing of *Milton*.

As *Milton* portrays the simultaneous self-annihilation of the author in the text and the author of the text, Blake develops the need for dialogue in the creation of the utterance. Against the Satanic-Urizenic Selfhood that manipulates others' responses through a duplicitous deployment of the arbitrary sign and coerces others to obey its monologic laws, Blake argues for the inspiration of dialogue, the inclusion of all voices, and the maintenance of individual identity. The crucial act that allows an individual to enter into dialogue is self-annihilation. Although self-annihilation appears as the dissolution of identity to one in Selfhood, the Selfhood is a "false body" "which must be put off and annihilated away" (*M* 40.35–36, E 142). Once individuals annihilate their Selfhoods, their utterances enter the dialogic chain of communication, becoming responses to previous utterances and anticipating and encouraging, but not manipulating, future utterances. Although the author of an utterance relinquishes

his or her monopoly over the utterance in dialogue, the utterance takes on greater authority because it is informed by a multitude of perspectives and not governed solely by the single, limited, and possibly misleading perspective of its author. Because others respond to the utterance and are not finalized by it, it avoids Eternal Death as it is reinterpreted and re-created in living dialogue.

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CHAPTER 5



JERUSALEM

THE READER AND SELF-ANNIHILATION

Whereas *Milton* concerns itself with the annihilation of authorial Selfhood, *Jerusalem* moves beyond *Milton* by focusing on the self-annihilation of the reader. Several critics have noted the emphasis that *Jerusalem* places on the reader and on his or her experience of reading the poem. Morris Eaves notes that the opening preface “To the Public” “immediately asserts an intimate personal relationship” between writer and reader and that one of the poem’s aims is “to reunite the artist and the work with the audience of art” (187). In a similar discussion, Roger R. Easson, who characterizes the relationship between Los and Albion as one of author and reader, claims that Albion represents the reader whose “intellectual forces” “fall from perfect communication” and “collapse into a state of frustrated non-communication” (321). Los, as author, reacts “to the fall of Reader/Albion by fathering a system of allegorical dissimulation and obscurity” that, by its very obscurity, brings readers into the creative process by requiring them to interpret and to reinvent the system for themselves, thereby delivering “individuals from systems” (Easson 321). Molly Anne Rothenberg describes the illustration on plate 97 as a “*scene of reading*,” since a figure, possibly Albion, stands in the foreground with his back to the reader and looks upward toward the text that occupies the upper third of the plate (92). Other critics have noticed the overtly rhetorical structure of *Jerusalem* that requires readers to reevaluate their relationship to the text. As W. J. T. Mitchell explains, “The overt structure is rather a rhetorical and oratorical one: we are reading four addresses, proclamations, prophecies . . . directed at four audiences.” With the four prefaces to each chapter—“To the Public,” “To the Jews,” “To the Deists,” and “To

the Christians"—addressing specific audiences, "the narrative is subordinate to the rhetorical and thematic concerns of the speaker as he relates to his audiences" (*Blake's Composite Art* 173–74). According to James E. Swearingen, "That mode of prophetic development does not represent a 'thingly' Jerusalem; instead it prepares us for 'figuring' Jerusalem, not a building of a material Golgonooza, but a refiguring of the audience's mode of being" (135). This emphasis on rhetoric and oratory is an essential aspect of inspiration, as Timothy Clark has argued: "Inspiration is a rhetorical concept. To be inspired is, necessarily, to inspire others" (3). As *Jerusalem* addresses its readers, it calls for a change in the way readers approach a text, necessitating that they undergo self-annihilation to enable themselves to become collaborators with the dialogically inspired author and participate in the creation of the poem, thus continuing the dialogue that self-closed readings would thwart. Furthermore, this change is necessitated on two levels: first, in Albion, Los's reader in *Jerusalem*, and second, in Blake's reader of *Jerusalem*. As *Milton* demonstrates the need for the annihilation of the authorial Selfhood so that the author does not impose his limited perspective on the reader, *Jerusalem* not only continues the theme of authorial self-annihilation but also encourages the reader to annihilate his or her Selfhood in order to enter into the dialogic inspiration that the poem passes on to an audience.

Given the historical context, this emphasis on the reader in *Jerusalem* should come as no surprise. As William St. Clair has documented so brilliantly, the late eighteenth century saw an explosion of reading among people of all classes. For about three centuries prior to the end of the eighteenth century, reading was essentially a government-controlled method to maintain the state's authority over religion, morality, and knowledge. The reading of the lower classes, in particular, was largely restricted to the English-language Bible, small chapbooks, and ballads. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, with the much greater breadth of texts available to so many more people, government and the ruling class became increasingly nervous, and reading became more and more politically volatile (11–12). Throughout the eighteenth century, members of the upper class viewed reading as antithetical to political stability, and St. Clair's description of the prevailing attitude is worth noting:

Among the main arguments put forward in the parliamentary bill that introduced a stamp duty on periodicals in 1701 was that the resulting higher prices would help keep such print from "the poorer sort of people," and so reduce the allure and enticement of reading among

their children. In 1757, Soame Jenyns argued that to “encourage the poor man to read and think, and thus to become more conscious of his misery, would be to fly in the face of divine intention.” George Hadley of Hull declared in 1788, in resisting moves to improve elementary schooling in his locality, that the people of Scotland had been more industrious before reading had become universal earlier in the century. Servants in England, he claimed, were reading when they ought to have been “renovating their faculties” by sleeping. . . . William Playfair, the unsympathetic editor of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* appointed by the industry after the author’s death, advised against policies which encouraged workers to learn to read. (109–10)

Of course, as texts became more widely disseminated and literacy more widespread, the established order attempted to counter the more radical political texts with what was deemed to be more suitable reading for the poor, like Hannah More’s Cheap Repository Tracts, as we noted in Chapters 1 and 3 (Richardson 31; Scheuermann 4; Gaull 47–48), and many books, like Thomas Sheridan’s *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, published in 1775 and reprinted many times, were produced to teach the vast numbers of new readers what to read and how to read (St. Clair 394–95). It is ironic that while England experienced an explosion of reading among people of all classes at the end of the eighteenth century, William Blake’s work never participated in that explosion, certainly not in the way that the works of Godwin, Wollstonecraft, or Paine did in that time. In this context, though, one can view *Jerusalem* as Blake’s attempt to teach readers how to read by incorporating self-annihilation into the reading process.

Before an author can inspire readers, however, he or she must, of course, undergo self-annihilation, and like *Milton*, *Jerusalem* contains the requisite annihilation of authorial Selfhood on the levels of both the author in the poem and the author of the poem. Los, the author of Golgonooza within the poem, must continually subdue his Selfhood in order to keep his project open to collaboration. Los’s Selfhood, his “Reasoning Power” (*J* 54.7, *E* 203), seeks to control the creative process and to resist the validity of others’ perspectives in the construction of Golgonooza, but Los thwarts his Selfhood’s urge to retain monologic authority by invoking the Saviour as his muse for assistance in annihilating his Selfhood and to include His voice in the creative process. The speaker of the poem also invokes the Saviour for assistance in the poem’s creation. But while the speaker of *Milton* expresses concern that his muses, the Daughters of Beulah, who tell

of "the False Tongue! vegetated" (*M* 2.10, *E* 96), may impose their voices over his own and monopolize the creative process, the speaker of *Jerusalem* displays no ambivalence toward the Saviour. As a muse figure, the Saviour, who is referred to throughout the poem as the "Divine Vision," the "Divine Humanity," the "Human Imagination," and the "Divine Voice" who appears and speaks *as multitudes*, poses no threat to the integrity of the individual's voice and will not impose His perspective on the speaker because He represents the dialogic ideal. While the annihilation of authorial Selfhood is just as necessary for *Jerusalem* as it is for *Milton*, it does not entail the risk in *Jerusalem* that it does in *Milton*, precisely because the muse in *Jerusalem* is the very embodiment of dialogue.

If readers fail to annihilate their Selfhoods, however, they would stand apart from the text in a judgmental position and deny the validity of the speaker's utterance, essentially silencing it and consigning it to what they see as the erroneous viewpoints that lie outside and contrary to their own, privileged perspectives. Instead of engaging the poem in dialogue and participating in its creation, the self-closed reader would remain cut off from the inspired discourse of the poem and locked away in an ideological prison similar to Urizen's. Nor does Blake want his readers simply to accept his poem as "truth" without challenging and confronting what he says. Such a passive understanding would merely allow the speaker's perspective to be superimposed over the reader's and would not contribute anything to the creation of the poem's meaning. Passive understanding, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, "contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word" ("Discourse in the Novel" 281). Neither monologic rejection nor passive understanding of the speaker's discourse would continue the dialogue initiated by the poet and muse in the poem. Blake wants his readers to form their own responses to the poem, each of which would recreate the poem anew.

To counteract the readers' self-closure and to encourage their participation in the creative process, *Jerusalem* addresses its readers directly, as we have noted, in not one but four prefaces, one for each of the four chapters. Each preface is directed to a specific audience not only in an attempt to provoke that audience's response to the poem, as Mitchell has noted, but also to include them as collaborative partners in the creation of the poem. Blake's strategy for encouraging his readers to annihilate their Selfhoods and enter into the poem's dialogue depends on what Bakhtin calls the "addressivity" of the utterance. As Bakhtin

explains, every utterance is directed to an addressee, to an other, and anticipates the other's response: "The utterance is related not only to preceding, but also to subsequent links in the chain of speech communion. . . . From the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions, for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created. . . . From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them [the others for whom the utterance is constructed], an accountive responsive understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response" ("PSG" 94). Not only is every utterance directed to an addressee, but also the construction of the utterance depends, at least in part, on the anticipation of a response. As Michael S. Macovski explains, "Addressivity thus locates the 'listener or partner' directly within the dialogic matrix: each narrator both reacts to and generates a corresponding field of rhetorical resonance" (19). This anticipation of a response from an "accountive" or, as Bakhtin calls it elsewhere, "active understanding" actually brings elements of that addressee's voice into the speaker's own utterance:

An active understanding, one that assimilates the word under consideration into a new conceptual system, that of the one striving to understand, establishes a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances with the word and enriches it with new elements. It is precisely such an understanding the speaker counts on. Therefore his orientation toward the listener is an orientation toward a specific conceptual horizon, toward the specific world of the listener; it introduces totally new elements into his discourse; it is in this way, after all, that various different points of view, conceptual horizons, systems for providing expressive accents, various "social languages" come to interact with one another. ("Discourse in the Novel" 282)

In addressing a specific listener, a speaker includes in his own discourse certain elements that not only anticipate the listener's response but are elements that come directly from the listener's perspective. As the speaker is confronted with the listener's "new conceptual system" that actively attempts to assimilate "the word under consideration," "totally new elements" are introduced into the speaker's discourse, enriching it with "a series of complex interrelationships." The speaker's construction of an utterance depends upon a kind of collaborative exchange with the listener, even though the listener has yet to respond or "even when a given auditor remains silent, implicit, or for the moment forgotten" (Macovski 19). By addressing his readers directly,

Blake constructs his utterance with his readers' possible responses in mind and not only provides an opportunity for them to respond but rhetorically initiates a collaboration with his readers, much like he does with his muse figures. In this sense, the readers of *Jerusalem* are brought into the creative process of the poem. By annihilating his authorial Selfhood to include the voice of the reader in the production of the poem, Blake invites the reader's self-annihilation to join him in that process.

Through the course of the poem, this effort to provoke the reader to participate in the creative process is dramatized through the struggle between Albion and Los. Although Albion continually rejects dialogic collaboration in favor of a hegemonic monolith of abstraction, Los, inspired by the Divine Vision, labors to return Albion to dialogue. In his labors, he progressively enlists the aid of more and more new voices that address Albion from their own perspectives to build a dialogic community in the ruins of Albion's lands. Finally, Albion realizes his divisive and exclusionary errors and, instead of rejecting the community of voices, engages it and collaborates in its continual and unfinalizable construction.

THE ANNIHILATION OF AUTHORIAL SELFHOOD IN *JERUSALEM*

As in *Milton*, *Jerusalem* contains an annihilation of authorial Selfhood, because without the inclusion of other voices in the creation of the poem, *Jerusalem* would lapse into the monologic self-closure of the speaker's limited and possibly misleading perspective. To achieve dialogic inspiration, the speaker must recognize, acknowledge, and respond to prior utterances to position his poem within the dialogic chain of communication.¹ Also as in *Milton*, the speaker's invocations to his muse function to bring these other voices into the poem's creation. In invocations to the muse, which occur on plates 5, 15, and 74, the speaker suggests the extent to which he relies on the muse's perspective to prevent the encroachment of monologic self-closure into the speaker's discourse. On plate 5, the speaker addresses his muse, the Saviour, to ask for assistance with his difficult task:

I rest not from my great task!
To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God. the Human Imagination
O Saviour pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love:

Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!
 Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly upon the rock of ages,
 While I write of the building of Golgonooza, & of the terrors of
 Entuthon. (*J* 5.17–24, *E* 147)

While the speaker's task is "to open the immortal Eyes of Man," he needs to do so without breaking the dialogic chain of communication. Denying the responsiveness of his own utterance and the future responses of others would cause his utterance to be Urizenically "self-closed, all-repelling" (*U* 3.3, *E* 70). His hand "trembles exceedingly upon the rock of ages," the place prepared by the Saviour where Albion, who is consumed by Selfhood, resides until his awakening. The rock of ages is a place of transition between monologic self-closure and dialogic expansion, and the speaker needs the voice of the Saviour to steady his hand to avoid a lapse into self-closure. In the invocation on plate 15, the speaker's situation is further delineated:

O Divine Spirit sustain me on thy wings!
 That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose.
 For Bacon & Newton sheath'd in dismal steel, their terrors hang
 Like iron scourges over Albion, Reasonings like vast Serpents
 Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations. (*J* 15.9–13, *E* 159)

As the speaker attempts to awaken Albion, he feels the encroachment of self-closed "Reasonings" affecting his own utterances, and he needs the collaboration with his muse to sustain his connection to dialogue. The fact that the speaker's "articulations" are "minute" suggests both the individuality and particularity of his utterances, a necessary quality for participation in dialogue, and the weakness of his individual voice in his struggle against the imposing power of monologic Reason. His anxiety about the serpents of Reason bruising his "minute articulations" indicates his fear of the serpents' infiltrating his utterances and subsuming his voice. In the invocation on plate 74, the speaker indicates that because he tells "how Albions Sons" "by Abstraction opposed to the Visions of Imagination / By cruel Laws divided Sixteen into Twelve Divisions" (*J* 74.24, 26–27, *E* 229–30), he needs for the "Lord my Saviour" to "open thou the Gates / And I will lead forth thy Words" (*J* 74.40–4, *E* 230). The very subject of the speaker's utterance, how the twelve Sons of Albion monologically subsume the sixteen Sons of Jerusalem by "abstraction" and "cruel Laws," necessitates a close, responsive link to the words of the

speaker's muse to avoid lapsing into self-closure.² His invocations to his muse maintain his dialogic connection with another voice as the two collaborate to produce the poem.

These invocations function similarly to the invocation to the Daughters of Beulah in *Milton* in that they annihilate the speaker's authorial Selfhood and rhetorically bring another voice into the creative process. Unlike the speaker of *Milton*, however, this speaker exhibits little or no anxiety over the relationship with his muse. In *Milton*, as we have seen, the speaker betrays a wariness about his muses. Since their realm is one of "terror," "soft sexual delusions," and "shadows" and since they have knowledge of the "False Tongue! vegetated," their discourse might be self-closed and impose the Daughters' perspective over the speaker's, dissolving his voice and identity (*M* 2.3, 11, 10, E 96). The muse for *Jerusalem*'s speaker, the Saviour, Jesus, the "Divine Voice" who often appears and speaks as multitudes, poses no threat to the integrity of the individual's voice. Rather than a single, Urizenic voice that monologically imposes itself over all individuals, the Divine Voice maintains the discreteness of each individual voice and "protects minute particulars, everyone in their own identity" (*J* 38.23, E 185). The protection of individual identity is essential for dialogue, since, as we have seen in the previous chapters, dialogic interchange requires separate individuals who communicate across their separateness. According to Bakhtin, "A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (*PDP* 252). By appearing and speaking as multitudes, the Saviour acknowledges the many individual voices that inform His own Divine Voice, even as His voice informs that of the poem's speaker. This speaker's muse, then, is the very figure who makes dialogue possible. While the speaker of *Milton* finds difficulty in trusting his muses, whom he fears will impose their voices over his own, the speaker of *Jerusalem* has no such fear because his muse is the quintessence of dialogue.

The dialogic construction of the poem and the collaborative nature of the relationship between speaker and muse are apparent at the poem's very beginning, even before the speaker invokes his muse:

Of the Sleep of Ulro! and of the passage through
Eternal Death! and of the awakening to Eternal Life.

This theme calls me in sleep night after night, & ev'ry morn
Awakes me at sun-rise, then I see the Saviour over me
Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song.

Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
(J 4.1–6, E 146)

According to the speaker, a theme “calls” him in his sleep and awakens him, and he then sees the Saviour “dictating” the words of a “mild song” to him. Instead of an invocation to a muse that opens the poem, as in *Milton*, the reader first witnesses the result of an invocation: the muse offering, or “dictating,” information to the speaker that informs the creation of the poem. Angela Esterhammer points out that this moment of inspiration is even more powerful than such moments in *Paradise Lost*, since rather than Milton’s muse Urania visiting the poet, it is the Saviour, himself (*Creating States* 186). Also, because the Saviour addresses the speaker directly, any doubt about the dialogic nature of the relationship between speaker and muse is removed. An invocation, a special case of the rhetorical figure of apostrophe—an address to an absent or imaginary figure—presents the speaker’s side of the conversation in an address to the muse and only *assumes* that the muse can hear the speaker and respond to him to participate in the creation of the poem. The opening of *Jerusalem*, though, presents to the reader the muse’s side of the conversation in an example of the rhetorical figure of prosopopoeia, the representation of an absent or imaginary figure as speaking. The muse’s address to the speaker of *Jerusalem* reverses the situation created by the conventional invocation and shows the muse’s role in the creative process. The opening of the poem demonstrates what Timothy Clark describes as “the poet’s cooperation with and partial surrender to the Muses,” which establishes “the guarantee of truth that transcends poet and auditor” (42). Rather than a merely assumed rhetorical connection between muse and speaker, the opening of *Jerusalem* makes the connection between muse and speaker and the muse’s participation in the poem’s creation actual.

Yet, the suggestion that the muse, the Saviour, dictates the poem to the speaker does not necessarily mean that the speaker loses his status as an equal participant in dialogue. If the muse’s “dictation” left no room for the speaker to respond to the muse from his or her own perspective, the muse’s dictates would be imposed on the speaker, who would only passively receive the muse’s utterance and repeat it verbatim. The concluding section of “To the Public,” however, indicates that the speaker does have an active, participatory role in the poem’s creation:

When this Verse was first dictated to me I consider’d a Monotonous
Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakspeare & all writers of English

Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming; to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts—the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for the inferior parts: all are necessary to each other. (*J* 3, E 145–46)

Although the verse is “dictated” to the speaker, he, and not the muse, chooses the metrical form in which to construct the poem. The speaker decides to avoid the “Monotonous Cadence” of blank verse and to use instead a “variety in every line,” and he studies “every word and every letter” to “put” them into their “fit” places. This variety allows him to differentiate metrically the “terrific parts” from the “mild & gentle parts” and both kinds from the “inferior parts.” Since he makes these metrical choices and decides for himself which parts are “terrific,” “mild & gentle,” and “inferior” in the construction of the poem, his reception of the muse’s “dictation” is not at all passive but is, rather, active, responsive, and creative. As he receives previous utterances—those of the muse and of previous metrical arrangements in “Milton & Shakspeare & all writers of English Blank Verse”—he assimilates them into his own conceptual system, and through “a series of complex interrelationships, consonances and dissonances” with the previous utterances, he enriches them with “new elements” (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” 282). Although the “dictation” of the muse provides the origin of the poem, the speaker receives the muse’s utterance and responds to it in dialogic collaboration to produce the poem. With the muse’s address to the speaker and the speaker’s prefatory discussion of his role in the creation of the poem, *Jerusalem* presents the clearest indication of the collaborative and dialogic relationship between muse and poet.³

Even the choice of meter for *Jerusalem* indicates an avoidance of authorial Selfhood and a desire to open the poem to a multitude of perspectives. Blake’s characterization of blank verse as “monotonous” “bondage” suggests not only a mono-, or single, tone in the verse but also a single, monologic voice. Antony Easthope has noted that since iambic pentameter downplays its accentual rhythms, thereby diminishing the performative aspect of reading or reciting the poem, and because it is an upper-class invention rather than a development of linguistic evolution, it works to “*disclaim the voice speaking the poem*

in favour of the voice represented in the poem, speaking what it says" (74). It is "individualist, elitist, privatized, offering the text as representation of a voice speaking" (Easthope 77). Iambic pentameter, according to Easthope, represents the voice in the poem as a "transcendental ego" imposed on the reader (69). A more heavily accentual meter like that of the ballad, which has evolved out of popular culture, foregrounds its rhythm and emphasizes performance and even allows more than one individual to participate in the recitation. It is, therefore, "collective, popular, intersubjective, accepting the text as a poem to be performed" (Easthope 77). Blake does not entirely reject blank verse completely. He uses it early in his career and in the first of two poems attached to "To the Christians," the preface to chapter 4 of *Jerusalem*, and he notes that blank verse is considered "to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse" (*J* 3, E 145). Blake's critique of iambic pentameter, however, suggests his awareness of the monologic tendency of blank verse and an understanding of the multivoiced nature of the loose seven-beat line found in his prophetic poetry, a line based on the ballad's combination of a four-beat line followed by a three-beat line. Instead of choosing a meter that imposes the "voice speaking" in the poem as a "transcendental ego" on the reader, Blake opts for a meter that is "collective, popular, intersubjective" and presents "the text as a poem to be performed," thereby allowing the reader's voice to participate in the poem's creation. According to Blake, blank verse is to the prophetic line as reason is to imagination; it has a definite role in English verse, but its role should be subordinate to the prophetic line.

Again, as in *Milton*, the annihilation of authorial Selfhood affects not only the authorial presence of the poem but the authorial presence within it as well. Both Roger Easson, as we have noted, and Mollyanne Marks have pointed to Los, the eternal prophet, as an authorial figure in the poem whose building of Golgonooza is analogous to authoring a text. According to Marks, Los's building, or authoring, of Golgonooza represents an attempt by the poet to establish his vision as a constructive force against Albion's fall into Selfhood and to enable Albion's awakening (37). Golgonooza, the city that Los builds, is "perfect in its building, ornaments & perfection," every part of which "is fourfold; & every inhabitant, fourfold," but it stands in opposition to and is surrounded by "the land of death eternal" where "Self-righteousnesses" are "conglomerating against the Divine Vision: / . . . Incoherent!" (*J* 12.53, 13.20, 30, 52–53, E 156–57). Although Golgonooza is perfect, it is still divided from Ulro, the land of incoherent and monologic Selfhood, nor will it be

completed until “the last day, when the graves shall yield their dead” (*J* 13.11, *E* 156). Its separation is emphasized by its closed Western Gate, and since the West is associated with the Tongue—“the Tongue is the West” (*J* 12.60, *E* 156)—the separation between Golgonooza and Ulro exists because of a resistance to dialogue. The construct that Los authors remains unfinished because it has not bridged the verbal gap between itself and Ulro, making the possibility for dialogue uncertain at best. While the building of Golgonooza prepares for a return to dialogic communication, it will always run the risk of becoming self-closed, unless Los, its author, becomes dialogically inspired and invites others to participate in the construction of Golgonooza.

Following the pattern of the annihilation of authorial Selfhood established in Blake’s work, Los receives inspiration for the building of Golgonooza early in the poem, and he struggles to maintain dialogic inspiration by annihilating his Selfhood and engaging in a series of exchanges with the Saviour in the same manner as the poem’s author. The building of Golgonooza begins when Los hears Jerusalem, Albion’s emanation, “among the Starry Wheels; / Lamenting for her children, for the sons & daughters of Albion,” because Albion has turned away from the Divine Vision and has hidden Jerusalem, removing himself and his emanation from the community of dialogue (*J* 5.65–66, *E* 148). Upon hearing her lament, Los is moved to tears, which “fall / Incessant before the Furnaces,” and he begins “building Golgonooza / Compelling his Spectre to labours mighty” (*J* 5.66–67, 10.17–18, *E* 148, 153). Los’s creative process in the building of Golgonooza begins not with a withdrawal into solitude and a rejection of previous utterances, as does Urizen’s creative process, but with a direct response to a previous utterance. Los’s actions, which come in response to Jerusalem, acknowledge her voice and maintain a dialogic chain of communication. Rather than creating in a vacuum and imposing his limited perspective on others, Los creates Golgonooza in response to another, allowing his creation to be informed by another’s perspective.

In order to maintain his dialogic inspiration and avoid self-closure, Los must continually annihilate his Selfhood, his monologic tendency identified in the poem as his Spectre, “who is the Reasoning Power” (*J* 54.7, *E* 203) and who has a “Westward” association with the closed gate of the Tongue (*J* 12.60, 13.6, *E* 156). If Los were to allow his Spectre to gain control of the creative process, Golgonooza would become another Urizenic structure, denying the perspectives of others and imposing the limited perspective of his Selfhood on them. The Western Gate would remain closed forever. Los’s Spectre, then, must be restricted to a more limited place in the creative process to

allow other voices to collaborate with Los. This process begins from the moment he responds with tears to Jerusalem's lament, continues without interruption through plate 17, and recurs periodically throughout the rest of the poem. Los's problems with his Spectre begin immediately after he responds to Jerusalem:

And his Emanation divided in pain,
Eastward toward the Starry Wheels. But Westward, a black Horror,
His spectre driv'n by the Starry Wheels of Albions sons, black and
Opake divided from his back; he labours and he mourns!
For as his Emanation divided, his Spectre also divided
In terror of those starry wheels: and the Spectre stood over Los
Howling in pain: a blackning Shadow, blackning dark & opake
Cursing the terrible Los: bitterly cursing him for his friendship
To Albion, suggesting murderous thoughts against Albion.
(*J* 5.67–6.7, *E* 148–49)

As Los responds to Jerusalem, his emanation, Enitharmon, moves eastward "toward the Starry Wheels." An emanation is defined in the poem as the light that shines from "every particular Form":

In Great Eternity, every particular Form gives forth or Emanates
Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision
And the Light is his Garment This is Jerusalem in every Man.
(*J* 54.1–3, *E* 203)

Under ideal conditions in Eternity, all individuals emit their own "light," which is their "Garment," and is how individuals present themselves to others. On a linguistic level, then, this emanation could be considered one's discourse, the way an individual expresses himself or herself to others. But conditions are not ideal, since Jerusalem is removed from dialogue, hidden among the Starry Wheels, the "cogs tyrannic / Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which / Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace" (*J* 15.18–20, *E* 159). Instead of remaining a part of him, Los's emanation divides from him as he responds to Jerusalem and moves "Eastward toward the Starry Wheels" in an attempt to reach Jerusalem, who remains trapped in Albion's "cogs tyrannic" of monologic self-closure.

As Los's emanation gravitates toward Jerusalem, Los's Spectre also divides and attempts to force Los to sever his friendship with Albion. While the division between Los and his emanation can be seen as expected and possibly even necessary, the division of the Spectre

seems unexpected, since it is contrasted to the division of the emanation with “but” in *J* 5.68, E 148. In effect, the Spectre attempts to shut Los’s mouth and prevent him from building Golgonooza and returning Albion to dialogue because he fears that Los’s self-annihilation will allow his emanation to be subsumed by Albion’s monologic Starry Wheels, dissolving his identity. Los’s Spectre, his Selfhood, is attempting to keep Los self-closed in order to resist the monologic power of Albion. He wonders whether Los will “go on to destruction? / Till thy life is all taken away by this deceitful Friendship? / [Albion] drinks thee up like water!” (*J* 7.9–11, E 149). He claims that the Sons of Albion will devise a “Law of Sin, to punish thee in thy members” (*J* 7.50, E 150). He later argues that Los is already under “the Law of God,” which “commands” that Los’s children should be considered and labeled as “Sins” and “that they be offered upon his Altar,” since God “is Righteous” and “feeds on Sacrifice & Offering: / Delighting in cries & tears & clothed in holiness & solitude” (*J* 10.37–39, 47–49, E 153). The Spectre claims that Los must prevent the monologic tendencies and self-closed discourse of Albion from gaining control over Los by following an even greater monologic power: the Urizenic “Law of God.” Los’s Spectre, who is Los’s own monologic tendency toward self-closure, insists that Los can only remain free from Albion’s control by becoming self-closed himself. To prevent the dissolution of Los’s voice in Albion’s Starry Wheels, the Spectre tries to keep Los self-closed.

But Los realizes that by remaining self-closed, he would be allowing his Spectre, his reasoning power, to dominate his creative process in the building of Golgonooza. The Spectre’s domination would prevent others from collaborating with Los, thereby rendering Golgonooza another Urizenic structure of monologic power. Although Los recognizes that the Spectre “Hast just cause to be irritated,” since Albion, by removing Jerusalem from dialogue, has caused their division, he recognizes the Spectre as his “Pride & Self-righteousness” and will not allow the Spectre “ever [to] assume the triple-form of Albions Spectre” (*J* 7.53, 8.30, 34, E 150–51). Los instead undergoes the “terrors of self annihilation” (*J* 7.61, E 150) and tells his Spectre,

I will compell thee to assist me in my terrible labours. To beat
These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death
I am inspired: I act not for myself: for Albions sake

.....

dare not to mock my inspired fury

.....

unless

Thou abstain ravening I will create an eternal Hell for thee.
 Take thou this Hammer & in patience heave the thundering Bellows
 Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me: labour obedient. (*J* 8.15–17, 35, 37–40, *E* 151)

Los, inspired by Jerusalem's lament, acts not for himself but "for Albion's sake" to return Albion to dialogue with the creation of Golgonooza. To keep his "inspired fury" free from the tendency toward self-closure, he reduces his Spectre's role in the creative process by compelling his Selfhood to "labour obedient" and to "assist [him] in [his] terrible labours." Against the Spectre's attempts to dominate the creative process and turn Golgonooza into self-closure, Los annihilates his Spectre and forces him to labor according to Los's inspiration. Although Los shows compassion toward the Spectre when he wipes off the "dark tears" that "ran down [the Spectre's] face," (*J* 10.60–61, *E* 154) he tells his Spectre that the Spectre must continue to labor; if he ever begins "to devour the Dead, / He might feel the pain as if a man gnawd his own tender nerves" (*J* 11.6–7, *E* 154). Whenever the Specter attempts to subsume others through monologic dominance, he will end up consuming himself.

One may consider that Los's dominance over his Spectre constitutes another example of monologic control. In his discussion of Los's confrontation with his Spectre, Swearingen argues that by *compelling* his Spectre to labor, Los denies the Spectre his own creative voice: "Los gains a functional sense of power by talking to, not with, the Spectre and Enitharmon. That hierarchy of responsibility and achievement denies the mutuality of political life and reserves the creative space to himself" (133). According to Swearingen, Los coerces others to labor for him rather than encouraging them to collaborate with him. Swearingen's argument, however, assumes that the Spectre and Enitharmon, Los's emanation, are completely separate, autonomous individuals in the fullest sense, while the poem suggests that they are, rather, component parts of Los, himself. As Esterhammer argues, "To the extent that Los creates his Spectre by the process of expressing and addressing it, the episode offers a powerful and self-conscious way of conceptualizing psychic division. In the dialogue between Los and his Spectre, language represents a principle of separation and externalization" (191). In fact, the Spectre and Emanation become divided from Los after Albion turns away from the Divine Vision, and that division produces a disruption in the fully integrated Los that he must now manage with language in order to be creative. Language in this sense

could be a dividing and externalizing force in the Spectre's handling of it, but for Los, it is a tool for both self-integration and for the reintegration of Albion. In this sense, Los may compel his Spectre to labor, but he does not completely stifle the Spectre, since Los does not silence him but instead responds to him by acknowledging the Spectre's "irritation" with Albion and consoling the Spectre by wiping away his tears. Rather, it is the Spectre who wants to stifle Los's voice and to control the creative process monologically. The Spectre is *Los's* reasoning power, and Los must undergo *self*-annihilation in order to keep his Spectre from governing the creative process. His treatment of his Spectre is not, therefore, yet another instance of Urizenic power. Los attempts to prevent himself from allowing his Spectre, or reasoning power, to build a coercive, monologic construct like Urizen's books and Albion's laws. Rather than coercing another to labor for him, Los reorganizes his own reasoning power within himself to retain his dialogic inspiration.

By keeping his reasoning power from monopolizing the creative process, Los remains open to the influence of others' perspectives. Indeed, once Los subdues his Spectre, we learn that Erin, the collective name for the Daughters of Beulah who are the emanations of the Four Zoas, and the Sons and Daughters of Los come forth from Los's Furnaces and are reunited with him after fearing "they never more should see their Father, who / Was built in from Eternity, in the Cliffs of Albion" (*J* 11.14–15, E 154). Once Los annihilates his Selfhood, Erin and Los's Sons and Daughters return and together "they builded Golgonooza" in dialogic collaboration (*J* 12.24, E 155). Swearingen, however, argues that Los plans Golgonooza in isolation much like Urizen or Albion: "Though others participate in the building, Los projects the plan in isolation. . . . In assuming responsibility for protecting human being, Los remains the reified self, a stereotypical figure of the Romantic artist as point of origin of all he creates" (131–32). Though Los's plan for Golgonooza may be his own, he is not necessarily its isolated point of origin, since the building of Golgonooza begins as a response to Jerusalem's lamentation. The origin of Golgonooza is not simply an isolated Los but is instead the prior utterance to which Los responds, without which Golgonooza would not exist. Furthermore, Los, like the speaker of *Jerusalem*, continually enlists the aid of the Saviour to sustain his dialogic inspiration. When he sees that "Albion is dead! his Emanation is divided from him!" and he feels his own emanation dividing from himself, he calls to the Saviour for assistance:

O pity me, thou all-piteous-one!
 What shall I do! or how exist, divided from Enitharmon?
 Yet why despair! I saw the finger of God go forth
 Upon my Furnaces,

 God is within, & without! he is even in the depths of Hell!

Such were the lamentations of the Labourers of the Furnaces!

And they appeared within & without incircling on both sides
 The Starry Wheels of Albions Sons, with Spaces for Jerusalem.
 (*J* 12.8–11, 15–18, *E* 155)

When the situation seems dire, Los calls to the “all-piteous-one” for assistance but realizes his despair is needless, since “God is within, & without,” is everywhere available for consultation, including in Los’s Furnaces, the site of his creativity. This realization allows the Labourers to appear everywhere around the Starry Wheels to offer Jerusalem a place in dialogue. Later, when Los is about to enter Albion, he asks the Divine Saviour to “arise / Upon the Mountains of Albion as in ancient time” (*J* 44.21–22, *E* 193). When he enters Albion and sees that Albion’s monologic power has reduced “every Universal Form” to “barren mountains of Moral / Virtue: and every Minute Particular hardend into grains of sand,” Los asks, “What can I do to hinder the Sons / of Albion from taking vengeance? or how shall I them persuade” as he “shout[s] loud for aid Divine” (*J* 45.19–20, 37–38, 46.9, *E* 194–95). In order to return Albion to a dialogic state, Los tries to maintain his own connection to dialogue by asking for assistance from his muse, the Divine Voice, to avoid the very self-closure that plagues Albion. Although Los does much of the work of building Golgonooza, he does not function without influence from other perspectives.

Unlike his earlier manifestations, the Los of *Jerusalem* is fully aware of his purpose and of the need to battle constantly his Spectre, his own Selfhood. The building of Golgonooza, then, functions as the construction of a kind of postlapsarian dialogic community that attempts to recover Albion from self-closure, a task that will not succeed without outside dialogic assistance. Indeed, much of the first book shows Los “self-subduing” his Spectre, which represents his reasoning power, so that the Spectre does not dominate the creative process but plays an appropriately minor role in building Golgonooza. In *Jerusalem*, as in much of Blake’s earlier poetry, reason is never completely eliminated from the production of discourse but must be consigned to a lesser

role. As we have seen, Los also engages in invocations similar to those of the speaker of the poem. Again, by invoking the Saviour, Los “kept the Divine Vision” as central to the creative process and allows the perspective of the other to inform his work (*J* 95.20, *E* 255). For both the speaker, the author *of* the poem, and Los, the author *in* the poem, self-annihilation is essential for dialogic inspiration.

SELF-ANNIHILATION OF THE READER OF *JERUSALEM*

Although the annihilation of the authorial Selfhood in *Jerusalem* is crucial to prevent self-closure and to maintain dialogic inspiration, it is not the immediate focus of the poem. The main thrust of *Jerusalem* is to encourage readers to annihilate their Selfhoods and to participate in the creation of the poem dialogically. Indeed, the very notion of inspiration foretells the moment of reception, as Timothy Clark has shown: “The writer is already, at the work’s very inception, projected into a scene of its reception, undergoing, in anticipation, a sense of the potential force of the emergent work upon the readers of his or her time and the publicly-sanctioned identity or role that accompanies such a relation to an audience” (29–30). Blake’s version of inspiration, moreover, is especially concerned that readers in the state of Selfhood may allow whatever ideological differences they might have with the author to prevent them from engaging the poem dialogically. As Molly Anne Rothenberg has noted, Blake is concerned with “the extent to which ideological assumptions appear to produce ‘natural’ or inevitable interpretations” and “the limits that occulted institutionalized significations and values place on the ‘perception’ of the world” (109). The ideological limits of Selfhood might lead readers to affirm or repudiate judgmentally and passively the author’s discourse based solely on whether the author’s ideological assumptions were compatible with their own. Rather than forming their own responses and engaging the poem from their own individual perspectives, readers in Selfhood would allow ideology to determine whether they would accept or deny the validity of the author’s discourse.

In order to encourage his readers to annihilate their Selfhoods and engage the poem dialogically, Blake directly addresses his audiences, as we have noted, in the four prefaces to each chapter of *Jerusalem*. Not only do these prefaces—“To the Public,” “To the Jews,” “To the Deists,” and “To the Christians”—address particular segments of Blake’s potential readership to make a specific appeal to each group

to open their own ideological self-closures, but their rhetorical status as addresses already begins to position the specific perspectives of the readers within a dialogic, collaborative framework. By addressing specific segments of his readership, Blake formulates his addresses in anticipation of his readers' potential responses, thereby including, as we have seen, elements of their specific perspectives in the addresses. According to Bakhtin, as we have noted, the addressivity of an utterance "creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. . . . The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogic relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's apperceptive background" ("Discourse in the Novel" 282). Because the addressee's "alien conceptual system" operates as a constitutive feature of the speaker's utterance, the rhetoric of address prepares for the reader's active response, even before any actual response takes place. By addressing his various readers directly in his four prefaces, Blake rhetorically begins to include his readers as individual collaborators in the creation of *Jerusalem*. By preparing "the ground for an active and engaged understanding," Blake begins to break through the "alien conceptual horizon" of each of his readers and to move them all toward self-annihilation.

Because of its position, the first preface, "To the Public" functions as a preface both to the first chapter and to the entire poem. Since it addresses the widest audience, it is also the most general of the prefaces. The speaker of "To the Public" opens with an intimate expression of connectedness with Blake's readers and an anticipation of their warm reception of his poem. The speaker notes that his "former Giants & Fairies" have "reciev'd the highest reward possible," which is the "[*love*] and [*friendship*] of those with whom to be connected, is to be [*blessed*]" (*J* 3, E 145). This previous connection to his readers and their reception of his work assure him "that this more consolidated & extended Work, will be as kindly recieved" (*J* 3, E 145). Yet though the speaker asserts an undoubted connection to his readership, a situation that hardly occurred for Blake in his lifetime, he immediately betrays doubts about impediments to the poem's reception: "The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes [*no reader will think presumptuousness or arroganc[e] when he is reminded that the Ancients acknowledge their love to their Deities*]" (*J* 3, E 145). The speaker suspects that his "enthusiasm" will appear as "presumptuousness or

arrogance" to his readers, leading them simply to dismiss the poem; hence, in anticipation of their potential attitude toward the poem's enthusiasm, the speaker reminds the reader that such enthusiasm is characteristic of "the Ancients," suggesting that if readers admire the Ancients and their enthusiasm, they should not reject the speaker's enthusiasm. As the speaker's address attempts to establish an intimate link with his readers, it also begins to anticipate and counter the readers' out-of-hand objections.

The doubts about the readers' reception of the poem are further enhanced by the alterations Blake made to the plate containing the first preface before he ever printed it. Blake made several deletions, indicated here by the bracketed and italicized text following Erdman's edition, all of which erase any term of affection toward the reader and even destroy much of the syntax. Blake also seems to have added the words "SHEEP" and "GOATS" in the upper-left-hand and upper-right-hand corners of the plate, respectively, making reference to Christ's separation of the nations at the Last Judgment in Matthew 25.32–33.⁴ Paley and Viscomi speculate that these alterations were made following a falling out Blake may have had with friends and/or buyers of his work (*Jerusalem* 11; *Blake* 338–39), but whatever the historical cause, they certainly show an increased and intense skepticism about his readers' worthiness. William G. Rowland goes so far as to say that the alterations are a commentary on how the obscurity of *Jerusalem* is a deliberate attempt by Blake to exclude his contemporary audience (73–74). From a reader's perspective, however, they prompt a more active engagement with the text in creating meaning through interpretation. As Pierce explains, "The 'art of writing' draws the reader out of a passive regard for the written word and into active reconstruction" (61).

The speaker continues with a discussion of forgiveness that, in effect, asks readers to annihilate their ideological Selfhoods: "The Spirit of Jesus is continual forgiveness of Sin: he who waits to be righteous before he enters into the Saviours kingdom, the Divine Body; will never enter there. I am perhaps the most sinful of men! I pretend not to holiness! yet I pretend to love, to see, to converse with daily, as man with man, & the more to have an interest in the Friend of Sinners. Therefore [*Dear*] Reader, [*forgive*] what you do not approve, & [*love*] me for this energetic exertion of my talent" (*J* 3, E 145). According to the speaker, "forgiveness" is a prerequisite both for entering "the Saviours kingdom" and for encountering the poem, whereas righteousness and holiness, characteristics of Urizen, Satan in *Milton*, and the Spectre's God in *Jerusalem*, keep individuals divided from others

because they cannot forgive what they “do not approve.” Forgiveness in *Jerusalem*, as Swearingen explains, “releases us from Urizen’s ‘Net of Religion’ that entangles human relations and constricts freedom” and “opens the way for a new series of unpredictable events” (140). In other words, forgiveness allows readers to break from their ideological assumptions, to engage the poem dialogically, and to respond to the poem on their own terms. By annihilating their ideological Selfhood, the readers can then enter into conversation with the sinful speaker and become themselves “the Friend of Sinners.”

The poem that concludes “To the Public,” poetically recreates, or reenvisions, the argument of the prose preface, as do all the preface poems, thereby giving the reader an alternative entrance into the larger poem of *Jerusalem*. The poem in “To the Public” provides the reader with a brief description of Blake’s poetic aim and the reader’s position in this process:

Reader! [*lover*] of books! [*lover*] of heaven,
And of that God from whom [*all books are given*],
Who in mysterious Sinais awful cave
To Man the wond’rous art of writing gave,
Again he speaks in thunder and in fire!
Thunder of Thought, & flames of fierce desire:
Even from the depths of Hell his voice I hear,
Within the unfathomd caverns of my Ear.
Therefore I print; nor vain my types shall be:
Heaven, Earth & Hell, henceforth shall live in harmony. (*J* 3.1–10, *E* 145)

By using the term “lover” in reference to the readers, Blake may be establishing their enthusiasm for the creation of meaning through reading. According to Pierce, Blake’s use of the term “lover” “transforms readers from passive consumers of inanimate objects to active and complementary producers of meanings” (61). But the reader is a “lover of books,” “of heaven,” and “of that God” the giver of “all books,” so he or she may not be able to *hear* the voice of God, “even from the depths of Hell,” as does the speaker. As a lover of heaven only, the reader’s conceptual system may exclude Earth and Hell as legitimate points of view. As a lover of books, the reader may adhere to the “Bibles or sacred codes,” which “have been the causes” of “Errors” (*MHH* 4, *E* 34). The speaker, who hears the voice of God from all regions and from all perspectives, will “print” in “types” that are not “vain,” reconceiving the book as a site for the dialogic “harmony” of

"Heaven, Earth, & Hell." If readers can annihilate their ideological Selfhoods and forgive what they do not approve of Earth and Hell, they can enter into the dialogue that the poem initiates. The reader who is a lover of Heaven does not have to become a lover of Earth or Hell to participate; the only prerequisite is self-annihilating forgiveness. Instead of being ideologically divided from lovers of Earth and Hell, the lovers of Heaven could thus participate in a more inclusive community.

While the next three prefaces are addressed to specific groups, they perform a function similar to that of the first, more general preface with respect to their specific addressees. In the second preface, "To the Jews," the speaker is concerned with "the Patriarchal Religion," of which Albion is "the Parent." While Albion lies in the "Chaotic State" of patriarchal power, "Satan & Adam & the whole world was Created by the Elohim," dividing individuals from each other and separating them "by compulsory cruel Sacrifices" (*J* 27, E 171). The speaker counters the monologic nature of the patriarchal power by suggesting that it is only one of many ways to comprehend reality, all of which are already united in dialogue: "Ye are united O ye Inhabitants of Earth in One Religion. The Religion of Jesus: the most Ancient, the Eternal: & the Everlasting Gospel—The Wicked will turn it to Wickedness, the Righteous to Righteousness" (*J* 27, E 171). In his address, the speaker includes all "Inhabitants of Earth" as members in the "Religion of Jesus," an all-inclusive space for individual interpretation that decentralizes patriarchal authority. Although "the Wicked will turn" the "One Religion" "to Wickedness" and "the Righteous to Righteousness," both the Wicked and the Righteous have a voice for their own interpretation, as long as neither is imposed on the other.

The poem for this preface reinforces the notion of recovering dialogue from patriarchal power with the speaker serving as the example. If the Religion of Jesus is "the most Ancient," it would have to come prior to the "Patriarchal Religion." The poem describes this early period in terms of the dialogic nature of prelapsarian Albion:

[Jerusalem] walks upon our meadows green:
The Lamb of God walks by her side:
And every English Child is seen,
Children of Jesus & his Bride,

Forgiving trespasses and sins
Lest Babylon with cruel Og,
With Moral & Self-righteous Law
Should Crucify in Satans Synagogue! (*J* 27.17–24, E 172)

The poem opens with an idyllic scene that shows the diversity of Albion. "Every English Child," "from Islington to Marybone, / To Primrose Hill and Saint Johns Wood" (*J* 27.1–2, *E* 171), is united by the forgiveness that staves off the patriarchal power of "Moral & Self-righteous Law." All are seen as "Children of Jesus & his Bride." When Albion sleeps "beneath the Fatal Tree," however, Satan, Albion's Spectre, "from his Loins / Tore forth in all the pomp of War," causing Jerusalem to fall "from Lambeth's Vale" "in War & howling death & woe" and "Planting [his] Family alone / Destroying all the World beside" (*J* 27.29, 37–38, 41, 44, 79–80, *E* 172–73). Although Satan fosters division by setting apart his "Family alone," causing the "Human Form" to be "witherd up" "By laws of sacrifice for sin," finalizing it into a "Mortal Worm," "the Divine Vision still was seen" "translucent all within" (*J* 27.53–55, 57, 56, *E* 173). Although the translucent Divine Vision is hidden within the opaque illusion of self-closure, the speaker can still address it, annihilate his Selfhood, and recover dialogue:

And O thou Lamb of God, whom I
Slew in my dark self-righteous pride:

.....

Create my Spirit to thy Love:
Subdue my Spectre to thy Fear.

Spectre of Albion! warlike Fiend!
In clouds of blood & ruin roll'd:

I here reclaim thee as my own
My Selfhood! Satan! armd in gold.

.....

In my Exchanges every Land
Shall walk, & mine in every Land,

Mutual shall build Jerusalem:
Both heart in heart & hand in hand. (*J* 27.65–66, 71–76, 85–88, *E* 173)

As the speaker addresses the Divine Vision, the Lamb of God, he enacts the central strategy of self-annihilation by asking the Saviour to "subdue [his] Spectre," thereby resisting his tendency toward self-closure and seeking another's perspective. The speaker then reclaims Albion's Spectre, Satan, as his own Selfhood and blames Satan for the rise of monologic power. By accepting Satan as his own Selfhood,

the speaker essentially blames himself for contributing to the monologic destruction caused by Albion's self-closure, suggesting that each individual must, like Los, avoid fighting monologic power by retreating into self-closure, undergo self-annihilation, and take responsibility for his or her own participation in dialogue. With dialogic inspiration from the Divine Vision, the speaker annihilates his own Selfhood and reclaims Albion's, thus allowing voices from "every Land" to "walk" dialogically within his own "Exchanges." If readers of this preface realize that their Selfhoods divide them from dialogue and then, following the speaker's example, undergo self-annihilation, their exchanges will not only carry the voices of others but will also mutually inform others' exchanges, as well.

In "To the Deists," Blake engages this particular audience by arguing that although they claim to be exposing hypocrisy in the church, their replacement for faulty Christianity is a religion of Selfhood, perpetuating "Tyrant Pride & the Laws of that Babylon" (*J* 52, E 200). The speaker's argument follows much the same strategy as the Deists in that it claims to expose their hypocrisy, but he replaces the Deists' tyrannical pride with forgiveness. According to the speaker, the Deists' "Greek Philosophy" "teaches that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre" and that their "profession is Virtue & Morality & the making Men Self-Righteous" (*J* 52, E 200–201). They "charge the Spiritually Religious" who fall "into Sin" "with Hypocrisy," even though "the 'Spiritually Religious' 'pretend not to be holier than others'" (*J* 52, E 201). The Deists make such claims because they are "constantly talking of the Virtues of the Human Heart, and particularly of [their] own, that [they] may accuse others & especially the Religious, whose errors, [they] by this display of pretended Virtue, chiefly design to expose" (*J* 52, E 201). By Urizenically privileging themselves and their virtues above others for the purpose of condemning others as hypocrites, they thereby divide themselves from others and stifle any chance for a dialogic community. When the speaker, who himself claims to be "the most sinful of men," says that "Friendship cannot exist without Forgiveness of Sins continually," he suggests that dialogue cannot exist without self-annihilation, since as we have noted, forgiveness allows an individual to set aside ideological differences and engage another's discourse dialogically.

The preface poem graphically demonstrates the premises of the speaker's argument. The poem opens with the speaker explaining that he "saw a Monk of Charlemaine" and the two converse "in beams of infernal light," but then the Deists Gibbon, Voltaire, and "the Schools" rise up and confine the Monk (*J* 52.1–4, 6, E 201):

Thou lazy Monk they sound afar
 In vain condemning glorious War
 And in your Cell you shall ever dwell
 Rise War & bind him in his Cell. (*J* 52.9–12, *E* 202)

While the monk and the speaker converse, the Deists appear to interrupt this conversation and confine the monk in his “Cell.” With monologic authority, the Deists divide the speaker from the Monk, interrupt dialogue, and force the monk into isolation. Since they privilege their own view of war over the Monk’s and stifle the Monk’s voice, they exhibit the monologic strategies attributed to them in the preface. After linking the Deists with Satan and “the Moral Law” who “spilled the blood of mercys Lord” (*J* 52.18, 20, *E* 202), the speaker addresses the Deists and says,

Vain

Your Grecian Mocks and & Roman Sword
 Against this image of his Lord!

For a Tear is an Intellectual thing;
 And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King
 And the bitter groan of a Martyrs woe
 Is an Arrow from the Almighty Bow! (*J* 52.22–28, *E* 202)

The speaker explains to the Deists that their “mocks” are vain against the forgiveness inherent in kingly “sighs” and “bitter groans,” the weapons of oral dialogue against monologic power. As an address, this last section of the poem attempts to reestablish the dialogue that the Deists have severed.

The final preface, “To the Christians,” argues against an authoritarian Christianity and in favor of a one in which each individual has an equal opportunity to participate. In the authoritarian version, the powerful rule and dictate to those not in power: “We are told to abstain from fleshly desires that we may lose no time from the Work of the Lord. Every moment lost, is a moment that cannot be redeemed every pleasure that intermingles with the duty of our station is a folly unredeemable & is planted like the seed of a wild flower among our wheat. All the tortures of repentance. are tortures of self-reproach on account of our leaving the Divine Harvest to the Enemy, the struggles of intanglement with incoherent roots” (*J* 77, *E* 231). This version of Christianity leaves no room for forgiveness or for dialogic interaction because it enforces a strict hierarchical division between the

powerful and the powerless. The powerless “we” of the passage are “told” by powerful others that the powerless, for whom no “pleasure” can “intermingle,” must perform “the duty of [their] stations.” The powerful also impose the “torture of self-reproach” for every transgression, suggesting that those in power have manipulated the powerless in such a way that the powerless enforce their own powerlessness. The powerful are characterized later in the preface as the “ignorance-loving Hypocrite,” who “despises & mocks a Mental Gift in another; calling it pride & selfishness & sin.” Mental Gifts, we are told, come from “Jesus, the giver of every Mental Gift” and the Divine Voice who gives every individual a place in dialogue. Such a “Mental Gift,” then, is anathema to the powerful since it empowers the individual with a voice and the ability to challenge Urizenic authority. For the powerless, however, this authoritarian Christianity amounts to “the struggles of intanglements with incoherent roots” (*J* 77, E 231). Since the monologic authority of the powerful is “incoherent,” it is impossible to comprehend and challenge with a response.

Instead of an authoritarian Christianity, the speaker favors a Christianity that is founded on the individual’s liberty to express himself or herself freely: “I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination” (*J* 77, E 231). The speaker claims that the imagination is the “real & eternal World” where “we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies,” a world in which each individual is free to create himself or herself, rather than a world in which an individual’s identity is imposed upon him or her by some outside authority (*J* 77, E 231). This freedom of expression is, of course, necessary to foster dialogue. The speaker then asks his readers a series of questions that not only frame the Gospels as supportive of dialogue but also encourage the readers to engage the speaker’s argument dialogically: “What were all [the Apostles’] spiritual gifts? . . . is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain? . . . What is that Talent which it is a curse to hide? What are the Treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up for ourselves, are they any other than Mental Studies & Performances?” (*J* 77, E 231). These questions suggest that the Apostles’ “spiritual gifts” and the “Intellectual Fountain” of “the Holy Ghost” provide the individual with the “talent” for “Mental Studies & Performance,” enabling individuals to interpret and speak creatively. The interrogative address to the readers, moreover, encourages them to exercise their “talents” by responding to the speaker’s questions. The speaker’s encouragement becomes even more provoking when it takes an imperative turn as he tells his readers to “answer this to yourselves”

(*J* 77, E 232). The speaker's final appeal calls for each individual to break from imposed strictures and to express his or her own individual identity freely: "Let every Christian as much as in him lies engage himself openly & publicly before all the world in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem" (*J* 77, E 232). According to the speaker, each Christian should "let" himself or herself make an individually creative contribution to the dialogic community. This appeal could even be taken as a direct command to the powerful who hold monologic authority over the powerless. Those in power should "let" others express their individual identity and, like the poet who asks the muse to collaborate in the creative process, relinquish their authority, acknowledge the validity of other perspectives, and unshackle dialogue.

The same rhetorical strategy occurs in the two poems that follow this preface, and these poems taken together form a microcosm of Blake's larger poetic practice. In the first poem, the speaker engages another figure in a dialogue about the nature of Christianity. While in his "valleys of the south," the speaker says that he saw a "Wheel / Of Fire surrounding all the heavens" from which "Man himself shrunk up / Into a little root a fathom long" (*J* 77.1–3, 10–11, E 232). The speaker then asks a "Holy-One / Its Name? he answerd. It is the Wheel of Religion" (*J* 77.12–13, E 232). Incredulous, the speaker asks, "Is this the law of Jesus," but the Holy-One explains that "Jesus died because he strove / Against the current of this Wheel" (*J* 77.14, 16–17, E 232). This wheel, explains the Holy-One, is

the dark Preacher of Death
Of sin, of sorrow, & of punishment;
Opposing Nature! It is Natural Religion
But Jesus is the bright Preacher of Life
Creating Nature from this fiery Law,
By self-denial & forgiveness of Sin. (*J* 77.18–23, E 232)

The wheel represents the Urizenic law "of sin, of sorrow & of punishment" that imposes its own perspective over "Nature"—the Deists' "Natural Religion." Jesus, however, creates Nature by undermining the imposition of Law through "self-denial & forgiveness of Sin." The speaker, moreover, learns this history of authoritarian imposition and its subversion through the maieutic process in dialogue. As in the preface, the imperative then replaces the interrogative as the Holy-One instructs the speaker to "Teach [the sick] True Happiness, but let no curse / Go forth out of thy mouth to blight their peace," to urge them to "happiness" without imposition (*J* 77.32–33, E 233).

Having received dialogic inspiration from a muse figure, the Holy-One, the speaker then turns to his readers in the second prefatory poem to bring his inspiration to them, as he urges England not to “close [Jerusalem] from thy ancient walls,” but to “awake! awake! awake!” to “a time of joy and love,” by hearing the call of “Jerusalem thy Sister” and receiving “the Lamb of God to dwell / In Englands green & pleasant bowers” (*J* 77.4, 1, 8, 2, 11–12, *E* 232). Armed with dialogic inspiration, the speaker addresses the readers to include them in this dialogue, enacting in miniature the kind of process the prefaces, as addresses to several groups of readers, initiate.

SELF-ANNIHILATION OF THE READER IN *JERUSALEM*

While the speaker of *Jerusalem* encourages his readers to annihilate their Selfhoods and participate in the dialogue that the poem initiates, Los, as the dialogically inspired poet within the poem, attempts to return Albion, his principle addressee, the “reader” in the poem, to the dialogic community that Albion continually rejects. Albion’s rejection of dialogue occurs at the opening of the poem, and although he flirts with self-annihilation on a number of occasions, he refuses to accept the validity of others’ voices and perspectives and remains isolated in Selfhood, keeping his emanation, Jerusalem, hidden. The rest of the poem revolves around Los’s attempts to convince Albion to annihilate his Selfhood and to bring him in contact with the Divine Vision. Although Los is not successful until the climactic scene at the end of the poem, he does manage along the way to enlist others to annihilate their Selfhoods, enter the dialogic community that he initiates by building Golgonooza, and assist in the recovery of Albion. As Timothy Clark has argued, inspiration is often an endeavor that creates community: “The poet, as first performer of the poem, participates in a quasi-ritual transformation that already embraces the poem’s auditors. Movement into the space of composition is a communal event” (43). By bringing the Divine Vision to others and enlarging the dialogic community over the course of the poem, Los is able to prepare the postlapsarian world of the poem for Albion’s reawakening.

As we have seen, *Jerusalem* opens with the Saviour appearing before the speaker of the poem and dictating the words of a “mild song” that offers a message of community and dialogue:

Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:

Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land.
 In all the dark Atlantic vale down from the hills of Surrey
 A black water accumulates, return Albion! return!
 Thy brethren call thee, and thy fathers, and thy sons,
 Thy nurses and thy mothers, thy sisters and thy daughters
 Weep at thy souls disease, and the Divine Vision is darkend:
 Thy Emanation that was wont to play before thy face,
 Beaming forth with her daughters into the Divine bosom [*Where!!*]
 Where hast thou hidden thy Emanation lovely Jerusalem
 From the vision and fruition of the Holy-one?
 I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend;
 Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:
 Lo! we are One; forgiving all Evil; Not seeking recompense!
 Ye are my members O ye sleepers of Beulah, land of shades!
 (J 4.6–21, E 146)

The Saviour calls to “the sleeper of the land of shadows,” Albion, who has hidden his emanation, Jerusalem, and has withdrawn from the dialogic mutuality of the Divine Vision, and invites him to awaken and return to the Oneness of the “vision and fruition of the Holy-one.” The Saviour calls to Albion and urges him to return to the oneness of the community of dialogue, and all of the Saviour’s members, Albion’s brethren, fathers, sons, nurses, mothers, sisters, and daughters, weep at his “souls disease.” Albion and his emanation, however, remain apart from the “fibres of love” that connect each individual with each other.

The dialogic nature of the Saviour’s song can be seen not only in its message but also in its dissemination. As we have noted, the Saviour “dictates” the song to the speaker of the poem and the two collaborate to produce it, since the concept of dictation does not prevent the speaker from contributing to the song’s creation. Although the song is “dictated” to the speaker, it is, however, addressed to Albion. Since the Saviour is not a “God afar off” but resides within the bosoms of all individuals, this spirit of dialogue speaks through or with the individual who is in touch with this Divine Vision, the dialogically inspired poet. The Saviour dictates the song to the speaker of the poem, and the two deliver the song to Albion together. The spirit of dialogue speaks through the individual who participates in it. This participatory nature of divinely inspired discourse runs counter to Locke’s view of the interpretation of biblical language, as R. Paul Yoder has demonstrated. In lamenting the many various interpretations of the Bible, Locke writes,

The Volumes of Interpreters, and Commentators on the Old and New Testament, are but too manifest proofs of this. Though everything said in the Text be infallibly true, yet the Reader may be, nay cannot chuse but be very fallible in the understanding of it. Nor is it to be wondred, that the Will of GOD, when clothed in Words, should be liable to that doubt and uncertainty, which unavoidably attends that sort of Conveyance, when even his Son, whilst cloathed in Flesh, was subject to all the Frailties and Inconveniencies of humane Nature, Sin excepted. (489–90; bk. 3, ch. 9, par. 23)

Locke assumes that there is only one “infallibly true” meaning of the biblical text determined by the “Will of GOD,” yet the fallibility of its interpreters generates a multitude of fallible interpretations. According to Yoder, both Locke and Blake recognize that the language issued by Christ, the “human form divine,” is being articulated in a fallen world and received by fallen listeners and readers, and it is therefore subject to the same problems of interpretation to which ordinary human language is subject. For Locke, the only solution to these difficulties is the application of reason to understanding. For Blake, however, God’s acceptance of human form as Christ elevates human language to divinity: “It is God’s becoming as we are that creates the Human Form Divine, and that authorizes a human standard of language, with all its figurativeness and shifting meanings” (7). Referring to Blake’s letter to Dr. Trussler of August 23, 1799, in which Blake claims that “the Bible” is “more Entertaining and Instructive than any other book” because it is “addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason” (E 702–3), Yoder adds, “The obscurity which Locke seeks to eradicate from language is, for Blake, redemptive for it rouses the human faculties, even of children, to act” (9).

Albion, who is in Selfhood and apart from dialogue, rejects the dialogic vision of the Saviour on ideological grounds, assuming, like Locke, that only one interpretation, incidentally the one to which he subscribes, is the proper one:

But the perturbed Man away turns down the valleys dark;
[Saying. We are not One: we are Many, thou most simulative]
 Phantom of the over heated brain! shadow of immortality!
 Seeking to keep my soul a victim to thy Love! which binds
 Man the enemy of man into deceitful friendships:
 Jerusalem is not! her daughters are indefinite:
 By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith.
 My mountains are my own, and I will keep them to myself!

The Malvern and the Cheviot, the Wolds Plinlimmon & Snowdon
Are mine. here will I build my Laws of Moral Virtue!
Humanity shall be no more: but war & princedom & victory!

So spoke Albion in jealous fears, hiding his Emanation. (*J* 4.22–33, E 146–47)

From Albion's perspective, the Saviour's idea of dialogic union appears as a "simulative phantom" and a "shadow" that seeks to absorb and erase his individuality by binding his "soul" to the Saviour's "love." Instead of forgiving incompatible ideological differences and engaging the Saviour's song in argument, he rejects it and denies its validity as a point of view. Instead of a group of individuals united in dialogue, the "One," Albion sees only the "many" separate individuals opposed to and at odds with each other, necessitating "Laws of Moral Virtue" to uphold his own perspective as the only truth and to enforce this privileged status with "war & princedom & victory." In order that "Man be separate from Man," he labels "ornaments" as "crimes" and "the labours / Of loves" as "unnatural consanguinities and friendships," and he condenses his "hills & valleys" "into solid rocks, stedfast! / A foundation and certainty and demonstrative truth" (*J* 28.12, 6–7, 9–11, E 174). "Self-exiled from the face of light & shine of morning," Albion's "trumpets, and the sweet sound of his harp / Are silent" (*J* 19.13, 3–4, E 164). Instead of engaging the Saviour's argument in favor of dialogic union, Albion "away turns" from the Saviour in Selfhood, opposed to others. The "ancient porches of Albion" become "darken'd!" and "drawn thro' unbounded space, scatter'd upon / The Void in incoherent despair!" (*J* 5.1–3, E 147).

After Albion turns away from the Divine Vision and into the void of isolated Selfhood, Los begins the process of self-annihilation in preparation for the building of Golgonooza that takes up a large segment of chapter 1. With his Selfhood subdued, Los addresses Albion for the first time in an attempt to return Albion to dialogue:

And One stood forth from the Divine Family & said

I feel my Spectre rising upon me! Albion! arouze thyself!
Why dost thou thunder with frozen Spectrous wrath against us?
The Spectre is, in Giant Man; insane, and most deform'd.
Thou wilt certainly provoke my Spectre against thine in fury!
He has a Sepulcher hewn out of a Rock ready for thee:

And a Death of Eight thousand years forg'd by thyself, upon
The point of his Spear! if thou persistest to forbid with Laws
Our Emanations, and to attack our secret supreme delights

So Los spoke: But when he saw blue death in Albions feet,
Again he join'd the Divine Body, following merciful;
While Albion fled more indignant! revengeful covering
His face and bosom with petrific hardness, and his hands
And feet, lest any should enter his bosom & embrace
His hidden heart. (*J* 33.1–34.3, E 179)

Since Los is “One” who “stood forth” from the “Divine Family,” he presents himself as an individual free and unbounded but still connected to the dialogic community. He addresses Albion and asks why he continues in Selfhood, his “frozen Spectrous wrath.” Los argues that Albion’s Selfhood, which forbids emanations and “secret supreme delights with Laws,” will provoke Los’s Spectre to rise up in vengeance against Albion. Los fears what Blake, as we have noted, has often indicated throughout his career: that when the oppressed revolt against monologic oppression, they often resort to similar monologic practices once they gain power; the oppressed become the oppressors. But as the Holy-One explains in the first poem in “To the Christians,” “Thou art not sent / To smite with terror & with punishments” but to “heal thou the sick of spiritual disease” (*J* 77.26–27, 25, E 233). While Los fears for Albion, he also recognizes that his own Spectre could be the cause of his friend’s downfall. Unmoved by Los’s argument, however, Albion refuses to answer Los and again rejects dialogic interaction, as he seals himself within opacity to prevent the possible dissolution of his individual identity from self-annihilation and dialogic interaction.

Los withdraws, returns to the Divine Body, and continues to pursue Albion. Later, Los again addresses Albion, but this time, his questioning elicits an answer:

Seeing Albion had turn'd his back against the Divine Vision,
Los said to Albion. Whither fleest thou? Albion reply'd.

I die! I go to Eternal Death! the shades of death
Hover within me & beneath, and spreading themselves outside
Like rocky clouds, build me a gloomy monument of woe:
Will none accompany me in my death? or be a Ransom for me
In that dark Valley? I have girded round my cloke, and on my feet
Bound these black shoes of death, & on my hands, death's iron gloves:

God hath forsaken me, & my friends are become a burden
 A weariness to me, & the human footstep is a terror to me.
 (*J* 35.14–23, E 181)

Rather than enter the dialogic community of the Divine Vision, Albion flees into the isolation of Selfhood and the finalization of Eternal Death that his laws, which “are death / To every energy of man, and forbid the springs of life,” generate (*J* 31.11–12, E 177). But even though Albion has rejected the Divine Vision, the Saviour has distinguished Albion from his state of Selfhood so “that Albion may arise again” (*J* 31.14, E 177). Still, Albion claims that “God has forsaken” him and that his “friends,” who try to draw him into dialogue, have become a burden to him. He wishes that another would either die with or for him. The “human footstep,” the path to dialogue through self-annihilation, fills him with terror. “Troubled,” though “not yet infected with the Error & Illusion” (*J* 35.24, 27, E 181), Los replies with two questions, which he answers himself:

Must the Wise die for an Atonement? does Mercy endure Atonement?
 No! It is Moral Severity, & destroys Mercy in its Victim. (*J* 35.25–26,
 E 181)

Impatient with Albion’s self-delusion, Los exposes Albion’s request for someone to die for him as yet another human sacrifice, an “atonement” for his own “Moral Severity.” Nevertheless, having elicited an answer from Albion, Los acts “against / Albions melancholy” and builds “the stubborn structure of the Language,” “English, the rough basement,” or Albion “must else have been a Dumb despair” (*J* 36.58–60, E 183). By addressing Albion and questioning him, Los elicits a response from Albion and, in effect, gives Albion a voice and an entry point into the dialogic community.

During the course of the poem, Los enlarges the dialogic circle in an effort to build a chorus of voices to reawaken Albion, but the task is difficult, since the power of monologic Selfhood remains an impediment. Having spoken to Albion and finding him unmoving, Los calls “the Friends of Albion,” and “trembling at the sight of Eternal Death / The four appear’d with their Emanations” (*J* 36.3–4, E 181).⁵ Instead of rallying behind Los, however, they, “silent,” “sick,” and “weeping,” “descended and fell down upon their knees round Albions knees, Swearing the Oath of God!” (*J* 36.6–9, E 181). Rather than uniting in dialogue with Los and working to recover Albion, they bow down before Albion and substitute an Urizenic oath for their

own voices. The twenty-four other "Friends of Albion" also appear, and all twenty-eight "trembled" "in cold despair" "around the Couch of Death in deep humiliation / And tortures of self-condemnation while their Spectres ragd within" (*J* 37.23–25, E 183). Because they see "Albion endeavouring to destroy their Emanations," they begin to see themselves as "Victims to one another & dreadfully plotting against each other / To prevent Albion walking about in the Four Complexions" (*J* 37.31, 38.4–5, E 183–84). Rather than "enter into [their] own Spectres, to behold [their] own corruptions," they beg the Urizenic "God of Albion" to "descend" and "deliver Jerusalem" (*J* 38.10–11, E 184). Instead of undergoing the perils of self-annihilation to enter dialogue and recover Albion, the Friends fall into the trap of Selfhood and begin to lose sight of the Divine Vision.

Disgusted by the cowering and bickering Friends of Albion, Los rages:

Why stand we here trembling around
 Calling on God for help; and not ourselves in whom God dwells
 Stretching a hand to save the falling Man:

 All you my Friends & Brothers! all you my beloved Companions!
 Have you also caught the infection of Sin & stern Repentance?
 I see Disease arise upon you! yet speak to me and give
 Me some comfort: why do you all stand silent? I alone
 Remain in permanent strength. Or is all this goodness & pity, only
 That you may take the greater vengeance in your Sepulcher.
 (*J* 38.12–14, 74–79, E 184, 186)

Los berates his "Friends & Brothers" for seeking the help of a false, extrapersonal, hierarchically superior God and not relying on themselves to unite in dialogue to save Albion. He notices the disease of monologism rise within them, and when he asks them to speak to him, they "stand silent," apart from dialogue and isolated from each other. Los's harangue works, however, since "at length they rose / With one accord in love sublime, & as on Cherubs wings / They Albion surround with kindest violence to bear him back / Against his will thro Los's Gate to Eden: four-fold; loud!" (*J* 38.82–39.3, E 186). As the twenty-eight respond to Los's argument and unite in dialogue, they attempt to recover Albion, but Albion withdraws. As they follow him into Ulro, they become "strucken with Albions disease [and] they become what they behold" (*J* 39.32, E 187). Nevertheless, they "assimilated and embrac'd Eternal Death for Albions sake" and "manifest, a Divine Vision!" (*J* 40.39, 38, E 188). Even though they enter

Ulro, they retain the Divine Vision and continue their attempts to recover Albion. Bath and Oxford each attempt to persuade Albion to annihilate his Selfhood, but “Albion turn’d away refusing comfort” (*J* 41.16, E 188).

As the poem progresses, Los continues to build a dialogic coalition even from unexpected sources. Toward the middle of the poem, Los confronts the Daughters of Albion, who “in every bosom they contrroll our Vegetative powers” (*J* 5.39, E 148). Los asks the Daughters to “entune” their “hymning Chorus mildly” “to the golden Loom of Love” and to “Chaunt! revoice!” “reeccho,” and “my dictate obey from your gold-beam’d Looms” (*J* 56.11, 13, 29, 32, 31, E 206). Although Los encourages them to reframe their discourse with dialogic inspiration, they reply that they cannot, since they “tremble at the light therefore: hiding fearful / The Divine Vision with Curtain & Veil & fleshly Tabernacle” (*J* 56.39–40, E 206). Although Los tells them to “Look back into the Church Paul,” they continue to “divide and unite in jealousy & cruelty,” “bonifying” the “inhabitants of Albion,” solidifying them into the opacity of Selfhood (*J* 56.42, 58.5, 8, 6, E 206–7). Later in the poem, when the Daughters realize their errors, they become repentant and “in tears / Began to give their souls away in the Furna[c]les of affliction” (*J* 82.78–79, E 240). Once in Los’s furnaces, he instructs them to “sit within the Mundane Shell: / Forming the fluctuating Globe according to their will” (*J* 83.33–34, E 241). Although the Daughters of Albion recreate only the material world, their task is essential, because “the land is markd for desolation & unless we plant / the seeds of Cities & of Villages in the Human bosom / Albion must be a rock of blood” (*J* 83.54–56, E 242). Unless the material world can be reconstructed, Albion will remain opaque and self-closed, never to be reconstituted in the translucence of dialogue. Through dialogic inspiration, Los slowly builds Golgonooza, a collaboration of many voices to reawaken Albion and to restore the Divine Vision.

The last seven plates of *Jerusalem* present the climactic reawakening of Albion, the abolition of Urizenic law, and the return of the Divine Vision. This dramatic moment at the end of the poem enacts, moreover, the reawakening of dialogue and the reformulation of a dialogic community. As Albion lies in his tomb, his body “closed apart from all Nations,” “The Breath Divine Breathed over Albion” (*J* 94.14, 18, E 254). Significantly, the Breath Divine does not awaken Albion but instead awakens “England who is Brittannia” “from Death on Albions bosom” (*J* 94.20, E 254). When she awakens, she sees the body of Albion and believes that she, “In Dreams of Chastity & Moral Law,” has “Murdered Albion” (*J* 94.23, E 254). As she finishes her lament,

Her voice pierc'd Albions clay cold ear. he moved upon the Rock
 The Breath Divine went forth upon the morning hills, Albion mov'd.
 (*J* 95.1–2, *E* 254)

Much as Jerusalem's lament dialogically inspires Los to build Golgo-nooza, as we have seen, so England's lament "pierc'd Albions clay cold ear," causing him to awaken. While the Divine Breath awakens England who laments the death of Albion, Albion awakens in response to England's utterance. Albion's awakening takes the form of a response to another's voice and places him within the framework of dialogue. Once dialogically engaged, he walks "clothed in flames," "speaking the Words of Eternity in Human Forms" (*J* 95.7, 9, *E* 255).

Once Albion is awakened to dialogue, the restoration of a dialogic community commences in Eternity. This restoration begins with a reprise of the opening of the poem, drawing together the parallels between Los and the speaker and Albion and the reader. At the poem's beginning, as we have seen, the Saviour "dictates" to the poem's speaker "the words" of a "mild song" that is addressed to Albion, and the two voices together call on Albion to give up his Urizenic authority and to participate in dialogue (*J* 4.5, *E* 146). Albion, however, turns away from the egalitarian dialogue of the Divine Vision to rule by self-closed authority. But when the Saviour appears to Albion at the end of the poem, Albion does not turn away:

Then Jesus appeared standing by Albion as the Good Shepherd
 By the lost Sheep that he hath found & Albion knew that it
 Was the Lord the Universal Humanity, & Albion saw his Form
 A Man. & they conversed as Man with Man, in Ages of Eternity
 And the Divine Appearance was the likeness & similitude of Los.
 (*J* 96.3–7, *E* 255)

Jesus, the Saviour, the Divine Voice appears in the form of Los, the dialogically inspired poet. The muse and poet are united by dialogue, and Albion, now receptive to dialogue, recognizes this union and takes part in it. As they converse, Albion expresses fear that his "Selfhood cruel / Marches against" the Saviour, but the Saviour replies, "Fear not Albion unless I die thou canst not live / . . . Thus do Men in Eternity / One for another to put off by forgiveness, every sin" (*J* 96.14, 18–19, *E* 255). With these words, Albion, who stands "in terror: not for himself but for his Friend / Divine" annihilates his Selfhood by throwing "himself into the Furnaces of affliction" (*J* 96.30–31, 35, *E* 256). Once his "Druid Spectre was Annihilate," Albion

calls to Jerusalem to awaken, bringing together all the cities and all the Sons and Daughters of Albion into dialogic harmony (*J* 98.6, *E* 257). “Awaking to Life among the Flowers of Beulah rejoicing in Unity” and in the “Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation,” “they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic” (*J* 98.21, 23, 28, *E* 257).

This climactic scene is initiated by Los earlier in the poem, when he stands forth from the Divine Family and, as an individual free and unbounded yet still connected to the dialogic community, addresses Albion who has severed his link to dialogue. By addressing Albion and anticipating his response, Los rhetorically begins to include Albion in the very dialogue Albion has forsaken, since Albion’s possible response operates as a constitutive feature of Los’s address. By preparing “the ground for an active and engaged understanding,” Los begins to break through Albion’s “alien conceptual horizon” and to move him toward self-annihilation (Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” 282). Throughout the rest of the poem, Los continues to summon Albion and, at the same time, enlists many voices in the building of Golgonooza for the awakening of Albion, much like the speaker, who through his prefaces, attempts to reawaken his many readers to the poem’s dialogic inspiration. By preparing the ground for their response, the speaker offers them an opportunity to engage with his discourse dialogically and to participate in the creation of the poem’s meaning. Whether they turn away, as did Albion so many times, depends on the individual reader.

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CONCLUSION



THE IRONY OF SELF-ANNIHILATION

Although Blake does not use the terms “Selfhood” or “self-annihilation” until later in his career, the concerns with which these terms are involved are evident, as we have seen, throughout his work. As W. J. T. Mitchell has noted, the earlier absence of these terms is “a reflection of how much more imaginative exploration [Blake] would have to engage in before” they “could be articulated.” The early work can be seen as “a seed for the later poems, raising problems which Blake could solve only by writing more poems” (*Blake’s Composite Art* 87). As the present study has attempted to show, Blake’s focus on the politics of communication leads him from the problem of language acquisition and the innocent speaker’s confrontation with the “mind-forg’d manacles” of experienced discourses to a vision in which both speakers and listeners annihilate their Selfhoods as they “conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright / Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty” (*SIE* 46.8, E 27; *J* 98.28–29, E 257). Throughout this search for the dialogic ideal, Blake employs multi-voiced genres—including the lyric collection, the Menippean satire, and an epic form that places renewed emphasis on the invocation as a moment of dialogic interaction and inspiration—to annihilate any tendency toward monologic authorial Selfhood and to engage the reader’s participation in the creation of the poem’s meaning. Yet, even at the conclusions of *Milton* and *Jerusalem* when dialogue has been restored through self-annihilation, the Selfhood, the domineering voice of the monologic “Reasoning Power,” is never completely annihilated, defeated, or silenced (*J* 54.7, E 203). Indeed, the lingering echoes of Selfhood, even in the later poetry, raise the issue of whether self-annihilation and dialogic inspiration can ever completely eliminate the power derived from monologic self-closure and the potential of its reemergence. The questions that remain are, to what extent does

Blake question the success of his project, and what significance does this skepticism have for his poetic development?

Of course, scholars of British Romanticism are not at all unfamiliar with the uncertainty experienced by the Romantic poets. As Jerome McGann notes, "In a Romantic poem the realm of the ideal is always observed as precarious—liable to vanish or move beyond one's reach at any time. . . . These are Romantic places because they locate areas of contradiction, conflict, and problematic alternatives. In short, Romantic poems take up transcendence and ideal subjects because these subjects occupy areas of critical uncertainty. The aim of the Romantic poem—especially in its early or 'High Romantic' phases—is to rediscover the ground of stability in these situations" (*Romantic Ideology* 72–73). According to McGann, Romantic poets are prone to uncertainty because in exploring "the realm of the ideal," their poetry attempts to negotiate stability within areas full of "contradiction, conflict, and problematic alternatives." In attempting to negotiate a dialogic ideal, Blake, like other Romantics, becomes acutely aware of its instability. In his earlier work, as we have seen, this awareness calls into question the very solutions that Blake proposes. In the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, children, who are predisposed to dialogue, attempt to enter the community of discourse only to find that the social institutions governing the discursive community force the children to give up their individuality as speaking subjects and impose their discourses on the children as incontrovertible truth. Against this backdrop of monologic imposition, the introductions to the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* propose an alternative to institutional monologism by representing the moments of poetic creation and reception as instances of dialogic interaction and inspiration. Yet even as the introductions propose the alternative of the dialogic ideal, they also call the alternative into question because of doubts about both the poet's ability to overcome his own lapses into monologism and problems with the addressees' abilities to break out of their passive acceptance of self-closed discourse and respond to the poet's inspired discourse. As the child who acts as a muse figure to the piper in the introduction to *Innocence* disappears, the piper is left in a position either to render the inspiration of his encounter into his song or to distort it into any ideology he alone wants to impose on others.

Similarly, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* also questions the effectiveness of the alternative it proposes, and in *The [First] Book of Urizen*, dialogic alternatives become unrealizable dreams. In the *Marriage's* conflict of interpretations, the Devil, who attempts to argue an alternative version of biblical history, admits that the

persuasiveness of his own argument is as coercive and imposing as the Angel's establishment view when he explains, "We impose on one another" (*MHH* 20, E 42). Blake suggests that a dialogic solution to the problem of imposition is illusory, tenuous at best, and perhaps even impossible. Either side of a debate can be just as likely to impose its version of the truth on the other and may simply replace one monologue for another. In *Urizen*, Blake's darkest prophecy, little hope for a dialogic solution exists. Only two brief instances—Los's looking back to Eternity after he has been severed from its unfinalizable dialogue, and Orc's cries that stir even the dead Urizen—seem to hint at the possibility of self-annihilation and the restoration of dialogue. These meager hopes soon fade, however, as the replication of reactive monologism renders any alternative impossible. Throughout Blake's earlier works, then, the problematic nature of a dialogic ideal always seems to threaten the possibility that this alternative could ever be achieved.

In Blake's later work, though, the uncertainty shifts from skepticism about whether the dialogic ideal is itself possible to questions about whether it is sustainable once it is reached. *Milton* and *Jerusalem* depict the attainment of this dialogic ideal with regard to the self-annihilation and inspiration of the author and of the reader respectively. Although the difficulties of self-annihilation are enormous for both Milton and Albion, they nevertheless succeed in annihilating their Selfhoods and achieving dialogic connectedness—Milton with his emanation as they collaborate in the creative process and Albion with the Saviour whose Divine Voice he can then receive. Ironically, however, the voices of self-closure are never completely eliminated at the conclusion of either poem. At the end of *Milton*, as we have noted, Satan is neither destroyed nor silenced but is left to howl and thunder in the background. Instead of engaging in self-closed domination to thwart Satan, Milton has engaged Satan's monologic authority by questioning it and by undermining it with a contrary vision, thereby restoring dialogue. Although Satan's power and position are considerably reduced, his voice has not been entirely excluded, leaving the possibility that he could somehow regain his power and domination if Milton were to give him an opening. The conclusion of *Jerusalem* also leaves open the possibility that dialogue may not always be sustainable. Earlier in the poem, the speaker attempts to awaken Albion, but his attempt is frustrated because the "Reasonings" of "Bacon & Newton sheathd in dismal steel, their terrors hang / Like iron scourges over Albion," keeping him locked in Selfhood (*J* 15.11–12, E 159). As the poem comes to a close, however, "Bacon & Newton & Locke," Blake's enemies of inspiration, appear with "Milton & Shakspear &

Chaucer" as part of the restoration of dialogue when the "Druid Spectre was Annihilate" (*J* 98.9, 6, E 257). Even after the annihilation of Albion's Selfhood, these three coercive voices of the Reasoning Power remain active and prominent, suggesting that they could, perhaps, regain their monologic dominance if given a chance. Although *Milton* and *Jerusalem* demonstrate the achievement of the dialogic ideal, they also seem to introduce the uncertainty of its future.

If we consider the earlier work as "a seed for the later poems," as Mitchell suggests, we may be able, however, to account for this ironic status of self-annihilation (*Blake's Composite Art* 87). By returning once again to the printing house of Hell in the *Marriage*, we may recall that a Dragon-Man, associated with Locke and reason, clears "away the rubbish from the caves mouth" and consumes the excess of the creative eaglelike men's and lions' delights (*MHH* 15, E 40). Although prolific, creative energy and the infinity of the imagination are featured in the transmission of knowledge in the printing house, reason is not excluded from the process, since it is indeed necessary for the process to function. All faculties and points of view, including the Reasoning Power, are incorporated into the discursive process. Consequently in *Jerusalem*, we see that when Los annihilates his Selfhood, he does not entirely eliminate his Spectre but reduces the Spectre's role in the creative process by compelling the Spectre to "labour obedient" and to "assist [him] in [his] terrible labours" (*J* 8.40, 15, E 151). We learn in *Milton*, moreover, that the Selfhood is a "false body" "which must be put off and annihilated away" (*M* 40.35–36, E 142). The problem of reason and Selfhood, then, is not that they exist but that they tend to dominate the creation and reception of the utterance, and according to Blake, this tendency must be continuously guarded against. To exclude the voices of reason completely would be to risk a return to the kind of monologic domination that the Eternals impose on Urizen when they exclude him from their dialogue, thereby imposing their representations of truth on him and silencing his voice.

The dialogic ideal for which Blake strives, then, is an inclusive one, even if some of the included voices seek to impose their truths on others. For the dialogic ideal to exist, it must include the very elements that seek to stifle it. The resistance to exclusionary domination can only be maintained by continual self-annihilation.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. The Romantics' notion of biblical inspiration reinforces the idea that the poet is not purely passive in receiving the muse's dictates. According to Anthony John Harding, "This inspiration was not seen by Romantic writers as simply the manipulation of passive human instruments by an all-powerful godhead that completely obliterated the individuality of the prophet. The Romantics insisted on the uncompromised humanity of the prophet: indeed, in the inspired state he or she was held to be most fully human" (5).
2. Steve Clark has shown that by considering the "implicit theological imperatives" in Locke's *Essay*, one may see that Locke and Blake are not as antithetical as they often appear (136). While my focus has been primarily on Blake's reaction to Locke's materialism, I agree with Steve Clark that Blake's problems with Locke have to do with the limitations that Locke imposes on the mind's operations. As he explains, "There is no condemnation of rationality *per se* in Blake. . . . Instead, there is an acute insight into the disproportion between its creative power and the world that it brings into being" (138).
3. As Essick notes, most eighteenth-century thinkers on language agreed that "the destiny of the sign was to become ever more abstract. . . . In terms of the internal structure of signs, the signifier, as a physical presence, is suppressed as much as possible in the pursuit of the transparent revelation of spirit as the final, transcendental signified" (*William Blake* 59).
4. Bakhtin also points to the rise of such monologic affirmation as a result of European rationalism: "The consolidation of monologism and its permeation into all spheres and ideological life was promoted in modern times by European rationalism, with its cult of a unified and exclusive reason, and especially by the Enlightenment. . . . Semantic unity of any sort is everywhere represented by a single consciousness and a single point of view" (*PDP* 82). This Enlightenment "cult of rationalism" and its practice of consolidation and abstraction is precisely what Blake operates against, with his Romantic emphasis on the individual imagination in dialogue.
5. An utterance is defined in Bakhtin as "a unit of speech communication," the boundaries of which "are determined by a *change of speaking*

subjects, that is a change of speakers” (“PSG” 71). Later in the same essay, Bakhtin indicates that an utterance can be either spoken or written and that a speaking subject can be either a speaker or a writer (“PSG” 92, 95). I will follow these definitions. For an exceptionally thoughtful and provocative study on orality and writing in Blake, see Pierce.

CHAPTER 1

1. Several critics have noted how children in a state of innocence build an integrated world for themselves through language. See Glen (137), Leader (29–30), and Esterhammer (*Creating States* 132–35).
2. These poems also function as a prelude to the ideas of Selfhood and self-annihilation. In terms of Blake’s later poetry, the coercive authority that the nurse of *Experience* demonstrates would put her in a state of Selfhood. The relinquishing of authority dialogically, as performed here by the nurse of *Innocence*, could be understood as the annihilation of one’s Selfhood.
3. Blake will develop this dramatized moment of poetic reception in *Milton* when a Bard tells the Sons of Albion the story of Milton’s fall. As a skeptical audience, the Sons of Albion question the Bard about the source of his story. He answers, “I am inspired: I know it is Truth!” (*M* 13.51, *E* 107). Thus the Bard verifies the dialogic source of his story, while Blake again presents the moment of poetic reception as a dialogic one.

CHAPTER 2

1. Kevin Gilmartin would disagree, cautioning that the preeminent status of the *Reflections* may be more of a twentieth-century distortion than an eighteenth-century fact, since Burke’s thinking was not especially typical of the conservative mainstream and since his influence waned significantly shortly after the *Reflections* was published (8–9). Jane Hodson makes the case, however, that where Burke and other conservatives disagreed most was not in Burke’s argument but in his use of hyperbolic rhetoric. She notes that nearly all of the reviews of the *Reflections*, both conservative and liberal, criticized Burke for the excesses in rhetoric. Burke and other conservatives, however, were united in their view that Paine’s plainer style indicated both Paine’s lack of education and studied understanding of the issues and an underhanded attempt to seduce the unlearned (48–52, 76, 124–26). St. Clair’s empirical analysis of readerships also seems difficult to refute.
2. Harold Bloom, in a 1958 article, calls the *Marriage* a “miniature ‘anatomy’” (55), using the term Northrop Frye prefers for Menippean satire, which he borrows from Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (*Anatomy of Criticism* 311–12). Leslie Tannenbaum links the *Marriage* to the satire tradition of Lucian of Samosata, a premier practitioner of Menippean

satire, and notes the popularity of the genre in the late eighteenth century ("Blake's News" 74). In their introduction to the *Marriage* in the Blake Trust/Princeton edition, Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi agree that the generic category into which the *Marriage* fits best is the Menippean satire (*Early Illuminated Books* 118). Although the production history, as Viscomi argues, suggests that Blake did not necessarily intend to produce a Menippean satire when he started out to produce the *Marriage* ("The Evolution" 282), the finished product clearly fits into that category.

3. For further discussion on the connection between Blake's rhetorical practices in other poems and the political discourse of the French Revolution, see Jon Mee (*Dangerous* 2) and William Richey (817).
4. As Tannenbaum points out, the adherence to the signifier instead of to the signified, or in Blake's terms, the abstracting of signifiers into an enclosed system, recollects Augustine's concept of slavery (*Biblical Tradition* 110). While Blake may not be arguing for an "adherence" to the signified, he would certainly agree that the worship of a signifier divorced from its referent constitutes slavery.
5. Stempel notes that the vision of the monkeys in the seven houses of brick satirizes Rousseau's social theory (74), twisting Rousseau's famous dictum from *The Social Contract*, "Man was/is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (4: 131). Blake burlesques Rousseau's idea that humans are higher apes who learn to talk and cooperate because of over-population and decreasing food supplies. In such a scenario, according to Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Men*, "Men are forced to flatter and destroy one another" (3: 75). Stempel writes that the *Marriage* is "Blake's declaration of independence from all that is merely 'natural': natural philosophy, natural religion, natural history, and *l'homme naturel*" (74). Moreover, the monkey skeleton becoming "Aristotles Analytics" may have been precipitated by Rousseau's epigraph from Aristotle's *Politics* to the *Discourse on Inequality*, which is translated as, "Not in corrupt things, but in those which are well ordered in accordance with nature, should one consider that which is natural" (3: 176n1). Blake may be suggesting that Rousseau's theory, as well as the Angel's, is the result of dogmatic adherence to Aristotle.
6. Blake's earlier works, including the *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and *Thel*, carry his name as "author and printer." Except for *Milton*, the term "author" is never used in later works, and Blake identifies himself only as "printer" or "publisher." That *Milton* should reinstate the term "author" to the title page is appropriate, since that work explores the self-annihilation of the author, as I shall argue in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER 3

1. As we have noted, finalization involves a monologically imposed definition of an individual that denies the individual the opportunity to add to or change this static other-imposed definition of oneself. Unfinalizability refers to the open-endedness of dialogic existence that constantly seeks to undo finalization.
2. As we have seen, only convention links the signifier and signified in an arbitrary sign. Creative understanding, as we have noted, refers to a listener's or reader's ability to take an active role in the production of meaning when encountering another's utterance. For a more detailed discussion of creative understanding, see Chapter 2.
3. For bibliographical descriptions and textual analysis of *Urizen*, including variant orders of plates and locations of copies, see Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi, *The William Blake Archive*, and Worrall. Other valuable sources include Bentley, *Blake Books* (166–85), Erdman's textual notes to the *Complete Poetry and Prose* (E 804), Erdman's edition of the *Illuminated Blake* (182), and McQuail (2–4).
4. Although the poem does not specifically indicate whether the narrator or the Eternals utter this question, the question is, ultimately, the Eternals', since as the invocation indicates, they provide the narrator with the story.
5. See Mitchell, "Blake's Radical Comedy" 284–85; Rajan 263–64, 265–66; and Esterhammer, *Creating States* 155.
6. Essick, as we have noted, points to Blake's use of figural language as a release from "the rigid matrices of Urizenic semiotics" (*William Blake* 156).
7. For a thorough discussion of the pictorial variants, see McQuail (14–40).
8. The standard scholarly plate order was developed by Geoffrey Keynes and adopted by Bentley and Erdman. As David Worrall points out, this order is based on a nonexistent, ideal copy and is extremely confusing (148). Nevertheless, I shall follow this order to identify individual plates, since it is the most readily available to readers.
9. The order of the text plates in the standard arrangement is as follows: 1 (the Title page), 2 (the "Preludium"), 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25, 28. Plates 9, 12, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 24, 26, and 27 are full-plate illustrations and account for the gaps in the text plate numbering. I provide this list as a frame of reference for the following discussion.
10. Erdman notes that the deletion of 3.44 and 5.1–2 might facilitate the removal of plate 4, but these lines are only marked for deletion, yet not deleted, in copy A, a version that contains plate 4 (E 805). These markings in A reinforce the idea of a work unfinalized by mechanical reproduction.
11. The omissions of plates 7 and 8 or of plate 8 only do not cause any disruption in the reading of the text. Plates 6 and 7 continue chapter III and end with complete sentences, and both 8 and 10 begin with the duplicate chapter IV headings. Chapter III can end on either plate 7 or 8, and 10 begins a new chapter IV.

12. Erdman indicates that 8 may possibly follow 10 in copy E, as well, but he relies on Keynes and Wolf, *William Blake's Illuminated Books: A Census* for the plate order in E, and could not verify the order personally as he has done for the other six copies known at the time of his examination (E 804; *The Illuminated Blake* 182). Erdman, though, has uncovered errors in Keynes and Wolf in copies he has examined. Both 8 and 10 begin with the "Chapter IV" heading, as I have noted, and end in complete sentences with Blake's verse numbers 6. Plate 11 begins with verse 7, so the reversal of 8 and 10 still maintains the text's continuity.

CHAPTER 4

1. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Los confines Urizen in the *Book of Urizen* to contain him and to keep him separate, as part of the Eternals' monologic backlash against Urizen.
2. This fall that originates with Urizen and Los is also referred to in *Milton* as the slaying of Albion (*M* 3.1, E 96). As Peter Otto has noted, Albion is not a single individual but represents all of humanity past, present, and future and is "in an important sense, the very shape of history itself" (42). In this sense, then, the fall can be seen as the death of a prelapsarian dialogic community, which Los now struggles to reinvent in the fallen world.
3. The speech plan, or "speech will," refers to the "subjective aspect of the utterance" and reflects "what the speaker *wishes* to say" (Bakhtin, "PSG" 77). More than intent, it operates within a broad purview in the composition of the utterance, determining not only its semantic aspect but also its stylistic aspects.
4. See Ian Balfour 133–34 for a detailed discussion of Locke's argument. Timothy Clark tracks the debate about enthusiasm through the eighteenth century, noting that such diverse writers as Meric Casaubon, Thomas Hobbes, Henry More, Alexander Ross and Jonathan Swift all attack the irrationality of enthusiasm as a dangerous threat to civic order, while figures like Lord Shaftesbury, William Duff, Edward Young, and Robert Lowth saw value in the idea of enthusiasm as it pertained to secular literary creation (63–76).
5. The Gods of Priam who fought for Troy are Mars, Venus, and Apollo. Los later singles out Apollo when he decries that "Lambeth [is] ruin'd and given / To the detestable Gods of Priam, to Apollo" (*M* 25.48–49, E 122). According to Damon, "Apollo, with his sun-chariot, was the equivalent of Urizen-Satan" (*A Blake Dictionary* 334).
6. Although giving the Seven Angels "*a* human form" suggests an elimination of the discreteness of each Angel, they are *each* given a human form, since later in the poem they appear as "*Forms* / Human" (*M* 39.6–7, E 140; emphasis added).
7. I do not intend to argue that the speaker/author of *Milton* and the literal William Blake of London (1757–1827) are identical, because to do so

would deny the internal dialogue of Blake's visionary experience. Blake does, however, make the identification between himself and the speaker of *Milton* closer than in any other work. As W. J. T. Mitchell notes, the historical circumstances of the poem's composition constitute a kind of self-annihilation for Blake ("Blake's Radical Comedy" 284). At Felpham under the patronage of William Hayley, William and Catherine Blake lived in relative ease, material security, and pastoral release from the tensions of London, but Blake was dissatisfied with working for Hayley. For the Blakes to leave Hayley's patronage meant a return to poverty, but it also meant a return to Blake's "visionary studies in London unannoyd & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity" (E 728). This biographical parallel serves precisely to increase the reader's awareness of the authorial presence in *Milton* that must be annihilated.

CHAPTER 5

1. As we have seen, Bakhtin explains that "every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances of a given sphere" and is, therefore, "a link in the chain of speech communication" ("PSG" 91). A speaker's monologic denial of the responsiveness of his or her own utterance causes the utterance to become self-closed.
2. The poem later notes that "the Sons of Albion are Twelve: the Sons of Jerusalem Sixteen" (*J* 74.23, E 229).
3. Several critics have commented on the apparently contradictory nature of the Blakean idea of creative imagination and dictated inspiration, and they generally agree that while the muse may "dictate" a message to the poet, the poet then transforms that message in the poem. Most critics focus on either the unconventionality of Blake's invocations or on the spoken-written dichotomy. See Bradford 124; Essick, "Jerusalem" 257; Esterhammer, *Creating States* 123; Pierce 62–62; and Rothenberg 11.
4. For a description of the alterations to *J* 3, see E 808–9 and Paley, *Jerusalem* 10–11, 133. Erdman says that he was able to recover the deleted text through photographic enlargement.
5. The "Friends of Albion" are the twenty-eight Cathedral Cities of Great Britain. The "four" are the four chief Cathedral Cities—Verulam (Canterbury), Edinburgh, London, and York—in which the other twenty-four appear fourfold. See Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* 71–74.

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